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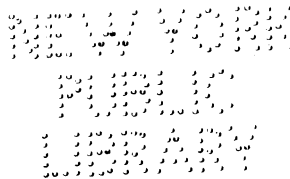
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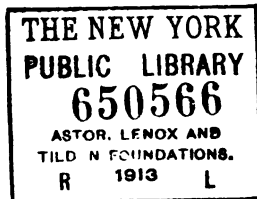


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BOOK I

A HORNET'S NEST

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CHAPTER I

DISCOVERS DEATH, THAT KLEPTOMANIAN, AT HIS USUAL TRICKS

OLD Mrs. Badcock is dying in spite of the warm cushions they are supporting her with; and Great Pines has sent the news to Little Pines in fulfilment of a long-standing compact that each town was to share the other's gossip. The compact was easily kept, not merely because the intervening distance of eight miles was considered to be no serious obstacle, but because both towns were usually overflowing with news, and found it necessary to give mutual relief. There was, indeed, no attempt at proportion between the size of Little Pines and the bulk of its gossip. And it may even have been that Little Piners, as Great Piners loved to call them, knew all that was happening to Mrs. Badcock long before the most energetic Great Piner was aware that she had turned ill. It was always a matter of surprise to Little Pines that such a far-travelled lady had not chosen itself in preference to its rival. But it had at least the satisfaction of possessing her corpse. For what reason Great Pines allowed its

richest inhabitant to lie in an alien cemetery is already matter for the archæologist. The best explanation is, doubtless, that since she had arrived only some three months ago with her grandchildren, her residence had been too short to make the rights of her citizenship indisputable.

Great Pines was so called because it was, or used to be, surrounded by a pine forest, where the trees had reached a great stature. The wood that sheltered Little Pines was of more recent date, and hence the names *Great* and *Little*. A stray visitor might have supposed that the difference of adjective was due to the smaller size of the younger town. Yet a skilful woodman, if he climbed the heights, would of course know that the trees which fenced Great Pines like a forest wall had deeper and broader foundations. Little Pines was prettier, for it lay snug at the feet of Loch Ludd, and Ludd lay at the feet of the great mountains. But Mrs. Badcock chose the rival town because she expected to find there a selecter society for her grandchildren.

"These grandchildren!" said Mrs. Crippen, of Great Pines, to Miss Pilking of Little, "*they'll* be well left!"

"Is't true, I mean the danger?" asked Miss Pilking.

"We're all waiting," replied Mrs. Crippen, wiping a tear, which thus vanished as quickly as it came, "and Muster's given up hope."

"Deh, deh! it's what we've all to come to," mur-

mured Miss Pilking, bobbing from side to side of her cane chair.

Dr. Muster, indeed, had fixed his eyeglass, and had looked in his wonted manner very steadily into the old lady's eyes, as if to see whether death, like a night robber, had entered the unbarred windows. She lay uneasy among her cushions.

"Easy, dear lady," he said softly. It was, to be sure, rather cowardly of death to snatch her away so suddenly. She was in a trouble, so the rumour went, about her dear grandchildren, Jessie Ring and Paul. She had never brought herself to believe that she could bear separation from them. But there were to be no more postponements of that fatal day.

"And *that* Jessie," continued Mrs. Crippen, "*she'll* be a brat, and a care to them that's to look after her. *Twenty*, she is, and just pert."

Dr. Muster comforted the old lady. But the truth was that she was being pushed very rapidly, if not too rudely, under the oppression and heaviness of our assured sleep. The temperature was rising, but it was only because Life, already almost driven out and indignant, was trying to make a show and make believe of large funds.

"Easy, dear lady," said Dr. Muster again, endeavouring to allay the excitement of death.

"My . . . dear children," said she, and looked up in tears and surmise.

Paul and Jessie were beside her in genuine and

befitting grief, Paul with his clear eyes now full of turmoil, and Jessie bent in her gesture of sorrow.

"Dear gran'ma!" they both cried, almost in one voice, and looked as if for help to Dr. Muster. It was scarcely to be believed that they were brother and sister, for their features were not similar. He was fair, and she was almost Italian for darkness of hair and of eyes.

"Who's to take them?" asked Miss Pilking, still bobbing on her chair.

"They say it's Muster," replied Mrs. Crippen, "and Bristol. Bristol's the cleverest man in our town."

Now Mrs. Crippen was never discovered in error, and the facts are as she reported. She felt personally responsible, not merely for the rate of transit of all news throughout the district, but also for the guarantee of its accuracy. Mrs. Badcock had been her special study for the last three months, and she already knew a good deal about her. That lady had, in truth, decided to confide Paul and Jessie to Bristol's and Dr. Muster's care. And no one who knew him will doubt Mrs. Crippen's word that Bristol, at any rate, was the cleverest man in Great Pines. If he is made to appear in this history less clever than he was, it should be accounted to the historian's insipidity. Mrs. Badcock, at least, was satisfied with the selection she had made. Both these men were strangers to her, but her choice of them had been caused by the peculiar circumstances

in which she had found herself. Of course it is easy for us to blame her now after we know the disaster of her mistake. Obviously if a man is extremely clever and a stranger to you it will be worse than foolish to commit great interests to his care. But Mrs. Badcock was in a hurry, and she did not even see the beginning of that tragedy which we now know to be one of the really piquant things of this century. She thought she had secured the right men, and no one who knew her intense love for her grandchildren will care to exaggerate her error.

Paul's mother had made an unfortunate marriage with the usual unfortunate results. Ring was besotted and be-drunkened; a military officer who had been discharged for evil conduct. It was not long before his wife, Mrs. Badcock's daughter, became a victim to the same violent habits to which he was the prey, and the one followed the other to an early grave. Their children were left to the care of Mrs. Badcock. She had no advisers to assist her in the delicate task of their upbringing except such as those whose advice she refused. These were the Rings, brothers of the deceased Colonel. Mrs. Badcock resented their interference, and took her grandchildren to Italy and France. Because she had premonitions of her own decease, and feared that Paul and Jessie might then be left unprotected she came home anxious to find guardians for them. Jessie was only one year older than Paul, who was nineteen at the time of Mrs. Badcock's death.

Their grandmother chose to settle in Great Pines on account of its seclusion and the general respectability of its society.

It was just then that Bristol's reputation for cleverness was already risen. By means of Dr. Muster, Mrs. Badcock was introduced to this extraordinary man. In a few weeks' time they appeared to have made a most profitable friendship. Bristol offered to help Paul at French. Paul is going into the army, to make, let us hope, a somewhat better reputation than his father's. He required tutoring. He was good-looking, and was invited to The Rookery. French was made pleasant by means of cigars and bath chairs in the garden. Instead of tearing one's hair over disagreeable verbs, Bristol suggested that they should sit in the sun, and discover how many objects of out-door life they could name in French. Mrs. Badcock was pleased that Paul had made so disinterested a friend; and because of her blindness, she should be pardoned for not having seen that Jessie appeared to have made one too. At any rate, she heard Bristol's praises sung by Dr. Muster and Mrs. Crippen. "A most exceptional young man," said Dr. Muster, tapping his snuff-box.

But the aged lady was soon to be overtaken by the sudden illness she had so long feared. She had not even rented a house, far less brought her own furniture to Great Pines. She had let the three months of that wonderful spring slip idly away. And when she was at last stricken down she found

herself as unprepared as ever—so far, at least, as arrangements for Jessie and Paul were concerned. In her helplessness she asked Dr. Muster to take the responsibility, and when he showed signs of shrinking from it and suggested that some one should be asked to share it with him, what could Mrs. Badcock do but think of Jacob Bristol?

“The very man,” said Dr. Muster.

He was sent for, and he accepted with an alacrity which surprised scrupulous Dr. Muster. At the last moment Mrs. Badcock seemed to be troubled by the thought that he might be too young, and she made an indication with her hand as if to say that Dr. Muster was to have Jessie as his special charge, and Bristol, Paul. It was not till she saw Bristol and Jessie in the same room together that the faintest anxiety appeared to disturb her thoughts. But grandmothers should surely know that guardians ought to be ugly and very old. Dr. Muster was certainly not ugly, but he was at least old. It was too late, however, and Mrs. Badcock was fast sinking. Yet her last words were of the nature of a revocation.

“I . . . I s-u-s . . . say he is s . . . s-s too . . . too . . . y-o-u-n-g!”

Dr. Muster did not forget it, neither did Paul. Some report that what she said was that he was too clever. And, indeed, in the light of all that we now know, that may be true. Bristol was standing at the foot of the couch with his great head bent and

the weird smile about his eyes and lips. No one would have said such a smile was out of place in such a scene. Rather, it was the cold beam of death itself, and seemed part of the solemnity. He raised his head slightly at the old lady's words, but bent it again as if they had been unintelligible. He of all men was interested at that moment in a psychic thing or two. Life, he was saying to himself, as he looked towards the couch, ay, he's the seedsman, and death, you see, has bought up all his crops before they're sown! He stood placid and dark and full of power. He had watched Jessie's perturbation. He knew Jessie. Too young! She did not think so. Too old, perhaps. This maiden . . . I know, I know, he was saying. And it was indeed piquant that love, who has all the universe to roam in, should have filled even a death-chamber with his ostentation. Her grief was genuine, but she was otherwise perturbed. She had been so perturbed for days. His was a fascination that grew visibly before you. She could not help herself. She had seen it deepening for two months. She looked back to him out of her tears as if he should share them in some special way. I have heard of love in a sick room, he was saying to himself, but love in a death room getting irresistibly born! The great sensations push each other out. And love will make his hour ostentatiously simultaneous with all the world's tragedy.

“ ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,’ ”

whispered the assisting clergyman, whispering it like a fine morphia for that last drowse.

“ ‘Yea, saith the Spirit,’ ” he continued, distilling a last drop of that fine drug of consolation.

The clergyman may be forgiven for not having perceived all that was passing that moment under his eyes, and that was simultaneous with the mid-solemnity of this death. Even Dr. Muster, intent on professional interests, interpreted Jessie's agitation in what seemed the proper way. As for Paul, he was overwhelmed in his boy's grief. Chaplain, doctor, young girl, young boy—Bristol knew that he alone was unique in that room. And Jessie certainly knew that she was the prey of a double agitation. It seemed monstrous. Yet for all her grief, a new, peculiar light was shining on this footpath of her calamity. The thought of her grandmother's death used to be the terror of her days, and she had said she could not live without her. And now! She was ashamed and confused, and began to mingle her grief again with Paul's. Yet a new sensation had ensured its swift subsidence. Bristol saw nothing unseemly in her double perturbation. The loss of this protector, he said, is causing her already instinctively to cling closer to the living, and to me! She is full of sensation. The great sensations, he was thinking, appear to lead a life apart and by themselves, and to be independent of us whom they take up one by one to exhaust and cast down, while *they* remain. In spite of herself, Jessie looked

down the couch again to where he was standing impassive. It was the very mock of death. He bowed to her almost without moving his head, and she burst out weeping once more. Love, he was saying, in his perpetual inner dialogue, thinks it never *sees* enough. Love looks, and looks again.

The uneasy sleeper was opening her eyes, and she said with a last painful effort—

“Too y-o-u-n-g!”

A flush broke over her face. It was the last warm blush life allowed her before she sank amid the cold weather of death; prophetic, it, of much in this book.

“Wonderful world,” ejaculated Dr. Muster.

Wonderful indeed, thought Bristol. But love will not be awed. Love evidently makes death a most familiar scarecrow on which to perch ironically to sing nightingale tunes.

“‘I am the Resurrection and the life,’” said the chaplain, as they went their ways.

“Best of men!” said Bristol, turning his face on the meek chaplain; “love says it too, and has been saying it to me all the afternoon.”

The astonished chaplain looked for enlightenment to Dr. Muster, but Dr. Muster seemed as much amazed, and they went home in silence.

“Mercy upon us!” said the chaplain to himself when he had arrived within his own gate, “and he was smiling all the time he said it!”

It was difficult to know what to do. No house had been purchased, and there was no home for the orphans. But it was understood that Mrs. Badcock had bequeathed them a considerable fortune. The two guardians deliberated, and after some disagreement finally agreed that until affairs got settled it was only proper that Jessie should live with Dr. Muster and Paul with Bristol.

"You are too young, you know," said Dr. Muster, smiling to Bristol.

Bristol smiled back, and accepted Paul. But Jessie went to see her brother every day at The Rookery until Dr. Muster began to shake his head.

CHAPTER II

IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN IT SEEMS

No one is going to suppose that it is unimportant to look into the early history of Jacob Bristol, The Tormentor. And certainly Jessie Ring who gave him that name would have been the first to point out the need of such an inquiry. Besides, all Great Piners who fell under his wizardry will read this chapter with some interest. Not long ago, indeed, a controversy was upsetting the quiet life of both Great Pines and Little Pines as to which of them must suffer the humiliation of having been his birthplace. And there ought to be no question that Mrs. Crippen of Great Pines and Miss Pilking of Little were the most vigorous of all the combatants. The discussion was mainly carried on by the women of both towns, the men being content to serve as umpires and bestowers of the applause. "How can it be when the tombs o' his grandams are in *your* town?" "Ay, and how not when my father knew his, and his bought the house in *your* town seven years before the villain saw the sun." Mrs. Crippen paused as if this evidence looked

strong "But the toms o' his dads," says she, "and Crippen, who was here as long as any one, used to say it was in *your* town!" "Deh! ma'am," replied Miss Pilking, with a stamp of her foot, "does a woman o' sense need to suppose that the toms o' his dads make *his* cradle! And ye used to tell me that Crippen hadn't a memory." "Except for what was bad. I always said," retorted Mrs. Crippen, "and ye'll confess that was sore bad!"

When it is remembered that Great Pines and Little Pines are only some eight miles apart an unimpassioned observer might suppose that the disgrace should be shared by them both. But some one—I think it was Dr. Muster—had the wit to suggest that it was only necessary to consult the Parish Register. And then it was discovered to the mortification of Miss Pilking that Little Pines had been his birthplace. "Forged!" said she. But victorious Mrs. Crippen could afford to let such puerilities pass.

Whatever dispute there was as to this point, there was never any as to the fact that Bristol spent most of his years at Great Pines, and especially that worst of them all round whose wicked months the pages of this book are to be grouped. In accordance with the custom of this age I ought to investigate with care the sources of his marvellous character. Surely a great amount of criminal feeling must have been accumulating among his ancestors

before it gathered such volume as to swamp him. But the mere mention of his name at Great and Little Pines was a sign for the throwing up of eyes and hands.

Even those who composed themselves sufficiently to attempt an account of his ancestors were easily detected in error. For while some, like Mrs. Crippen, in order to make his condemnation more thorough, discovered in his parents, grandparents, and so forth, and with an accuracy too minute not to be suspicious, virtues of a superhuman sort; others, such as Miss Pilking, with more science but less dramatic talent, perhaps, gave a history of the crimes of the Bristol family that rapidly assumed the form of the grotesque. In short, it is doubtless too soon to furnish a full account, and my plan is simply to make some "fierce abridgment" of the more startling events. It is a matter of genuine regret that since this book was planned and begun, Mrs. Crippen has died; because she had promised to run over the pages in order to modify any statement that might have appeared too strong, and to strengthen any that might have appeared too modified. I must simply do my best without her. And I take this opportunity of saying that she gave me full permission to make public all that relates to her here. She desired a clear statement of the truth, for she felt confident that posterity would acquit her of all the misdemeanours that Bristol—"that monster," as she used to say—had imputed to her.

That my task is pleasant, I shall not say, but that it is important, I shall say with emphasis. For the biography of a man like Bristol is as really, though perhaps not so directly, edifying as the biography of any saint. It lets you see by contrast what a height the saint leaps. In truth, the world seems to be finally interested not so much in its art or science as in its own conduct. And the streams of evil and of good, those two parallels which always meet, may perhaps best be represented by a series of Plutarchian parallel lines of scoundrels and of saints. I leave the saints to other people.

Now I have examined many of the "tombs of his grandams," and I find that the majority of the Bristols "sleep in the Lord," a fact which conflicts with Miss Pilking's complete denunciation of every one of them. His mother died at his birth, as I am told the mothers of monsters generally do. And on her stone there is a pathetic line commending her orphan to "Everlasting Arms,"—of Satan, Miss Pilking used to add with just a touch of irreverence. The father who lived to be overtaken in the calamity which finally overtook the son was struck blind before the son went to college. Nay, he used to suppose Jacob was at college when perhaps Jacob was dodging him in the lobby, or playing at riding on the garden wall with Fanny Mossman. But blind Mr. Bristol smiled content, and often went next door to show "old Seer Mossman," as Fanny's father was called, his son's certificates. He was not

satisfied merely to hear Jacob read to them aloud. They were printed over again in raised type for the blind, under the supervision of Jacob himself, who supplied important omissions and adjusted whatever statement appeared to require adjustment. "For a lie," as he used to say in after years, "may become a most soft pad, you know, and save many a wound." When, for instance, it was stated that Mr. Jacob Bristol had attended "somewhat irregularly," there was an obvious change into "very regularly." And where, in the original, "Mr. J. Bristol attained to the third class" in any subject, the same gentleman appeared in the amended document as having "attained to the first class." And so on through a series of similar changes. There could be little wonder, therefore, if Mr. Bristol passed his fingers along the cards over and over, while a pleased smile lit up his pale face.

The Bristols' house was the pride and partly the envy of Great Pines. It was far finer, for instance, than The Lodge in which the impecunious Lord Sother and his sister Lady Emma, Mrs. Crippen's near neighbours, used to live. And Mrs. Crippen who, because of her widowhood and propinquity to my lord was an object of anxiety to my lady Emma, admitted that she envied Mr. Bristol, blind though he was, his fine elms and beeches. The house was called by the familiar name "The Rookery" since the place was full of rooks. Mr. Mossman called his The Elms, because his trees were as fine as Mr.

Bristol's ; Mrs. Crippen named hers—Crippen in full protest—The Hills. Crippen wanted Knolls, and to the day of his death was never brought to see that the difference was so trivial as not to deserve recognition. In mere spite, since his wife had been victorious in the final selection of name, he used to write Knolls at the head of his letters, and the postboy had sometimes to remember that letters addressed Knolls and Hills were to be delivered at the same door. Perhaps the earliest audacity of which young Bristol was guilty was a special adaptation of the text he had heard so many sermons upon—"I to The Hills will lift mine eyes." But, as he used to admit, *he* did it for a sweetmeat, though in after life he could not discover the difference between his own motive and other people's.

Mrs. Crippen confessed that in those early days she could smile at him, for he was a pretty, slender boy; and here are two stories of his childhood she gave me, significant evidently of what was to come. He was not five years old when a habit of picturesque fibbing began to develop. One day he found a jug of milk on the kitchen shelf, and he drank about a half. Already a little master in the secrets of subtraction and addition, he thought it wise to fill the jug with water, in default of milk, as far as the former level. On the discovery of this fraud he replied without any great signs of perturbation that he had done it "to freshen it up!" His father was so proud of this premature display of wit that it was

rehearsed to every comer, and the boy turning vain over it applied its principle to little schemes of a similar kind. For instance, Mr. Bristol once presented him with a Bible by way of birthday gift. In a few minutes he was discovered in an agony of tears. Asked the reason, he replied, "'cause of mine 'niquities!" though he knew that he ought to have said, "'cause 'spected a 'ocking hoss!" And he lived to repent that stroke of young policy, because next birthday saw him with a manual of devotion in his hands.

But in those days of his comparative innocence he and Fanny used to go hand in hand, and, oh! the meadows were sweet. They took turn about in each other's garden, and planted heartsease and forget-me-not. Did she not come running to him one day with a rose that had pricked her to say indignantly "*It bites!*" It required their joint efforts to keep the peace between Seer Mossman's and Mr. Bristol's workmen, for the one was always depreciating the horticultural methods of the other, and Black Harry (Mr. Bristol's man) used to bawl over many ungenerous remarks about the "upsettin' pianny (peony) drabs" of his neighbour. And Jack, so Fanny called Jacob, sometimes played young cavalier, to be sure, and helped my little lady to throw stones at his own man. They sat together in the village school, and wrote each other's name on their slates. They hired themselves out to the farmers, and stipulated buttermilk. Weary with the heavy

corn sheaves they dropped down together, and slept as soundly as the poppies. They made journey to Loch Ludd, the clear, the deep, which was vast as the sea, they thought, and where Narcissus did not need to fall in love with his own reflection. Such days of boon when the summer freedom came, and they could take their ponies. Ay, and the long pearly summer nights. Seer Mossman and Mr. Bristol thought boy and girl were snug a-bed while boy and girl were in their nightgowns at their windows, where they looked radiant under the red sky like dream children, and the lattice was a lover's dream lattice for the light of love's young dream, and the intervening boughs of honeysuckle made dream foliage and fine arras. "O Jack, you and me!" "O Fan, yes!" And she plucked a bunch of honeysuckle from her own tree and he a bunch from his, and the bunches were thrown over to be brought under the pillows. Did she not upbraid the jasmine and call it naughty because it was too light to be thrown over, and always fell in the middle? And for their waking, did he not push over a pole and rattle at her window and pull sleep-a-bed out to hunt the star of the morning over the hill? O childhood and youth with the million, million years before it!

But the circle of that heaven of their infancy was gradually vanishing, and the day came when he must no longer rattle at her window. Double blinds were put up at both their windows, which was sym-

bolic of a tremendous change. Broke suddenly the divine light of childhood, and found them blushing in a light of common day. Then, because that light was too strong, Fan pulled down the blinds of her bashfulness. Snap, the magic circle had indeed vanished! We have been in dreamland. Perhaps, and considering all that came, it would have been better for you both if you had remained there. Better chase the butterflies than be chased by the world's hornet swarm! And each of you will be stung in to the red quicks of life. Meantime it is a Mr. Bristol, or, at the most, Master Bristol, who is standing before you now, young lady, home from his first college term. And it seems that *you* have become Miss Mossman all of a sudden, or on the most familiar terms now possible, Miss Fanny. But, as if the spirit of fun determined to fight for its place to the last, they began old pranks and games. Took to see-saw again, but gave it up as suddenly since it looked too stupid; then went to the swing, but abandoned it as soon; then for a run on the great walls. No, no, give it up. You are become solemn, and all that is possible now is a saunter among the bushes. But an occasional eye-dart at each other? Maybe; and when the eyes meet and produce their ignition some sudden nothing about sundown. It is all gone then, aha! and the pains are beginning.

Those of course were the days before Jessie Ring came. When Jessie came the pains were likely doubled—at least for Fanny. But even already,

although she was fair and slender, he seemed not to notice it when he came back. She thought he had grown cold. He now lingered seldom with her about the lawns, and it was always, "I must go to my books, you know!" She felt he was becoming too solemn, and had it not been for an occasional roguishness in his eyes he seemed to be passing out of her comprehension. He was tall now, and like a man, whilst she felt herself still a child. Women's character goes through fewer variations than men's. It is our privilege to assimilate more, it is theirs to assimilate less. But she tried to keep pace with him. "I will go to my books too," she said with a smile. But these were love's books, with many a tale of maiden sorrow, while his were books of wisdom and of the world's craft. He seemed never to get beyond the beginnings of civility even, he who used to twine his arm about her neck. During the intervals of his college career she noticed he was turning restless, and that his phrases were becoming piquant. "He is going to be very clever," she said. She was enclosed within the great walls of her father's garden, and wondered what in the big world had made the difference. "He has seen the city girls," she thought, "and likes them!" But at least he never talked about them. "Do you like the big cities?" she asked. "Oh, yes," he said in a way that became characteristic of his strange future, and was already almost pompously prophetic of it. "Oh, yes, as a spectacle. They're

full of iniquity. Your parson here says sin is ugly and black. But it sits sometimes among rainbows and sunbeams." She was startled. "*Your* parson!" She thought it was the affectation of seriousness and audacity of a youth of *twenty-three*! It was rather the freshness of that first poetry of his days which deserted him too soon. He was becoming strange. Jessie Ring should have seen him at this stage. His head was rich and dark, and his face seemed woven of pallor. Fan drew back afraid. He might be saying she was so much rusticity. She asked her father timidly, and Seer Mossman, who was always buried in books, and had left her to the care of Mother Rachel, her old nurse, said that young men's hearts are ruddy, or at least phosphorescent. "Ay, but," said the old man, stroking her hair, "I forgot you get phosphorescence in cold salt water, dearie. Not the dry light maybe? Bad for him then." She did not understand, and went away wondering, and threw herself on her bed. Have I not seen these first tears spilling over hot, mysterious, from life's strange thermal spring?

As for young Bristol, if he ever had any sentimentalities he was rapidly losing them. He was rather in the sort of mood of that eighteenth-century chemist, who, when his wife began to weep, ran for a phial to collect her tears, in order to discover their chemical composition. Had turned cynic, and a lecture was seldom so interesting as the lines of vanity on the lecturer's face. He laughed

at their heavy wisdom, and read books of his own choosing—Helvetius, Machiavelli. The first maxim he made was that men should not burn like candles turned downwards. He put it in an essay, but when he found it scored and corrected "you mean at both ends," he told Fan that his professor was a surprising ass. He attended lectures no more. Luckily, he was able to look at the world from the outside, slightly elevated above it. His father was rich, and had only him for an heir. Life lay before him like something to get hatched. He felt inclined to stamp on it and break the shell. But caution forbade. He would brood and ponder and watch men and use them. He had already the reputation of a most clear head, and Great Pines and Little wondered why he remained shut up at The Rookery. But in spite of a great reserve he could become "marvellous lively" when he pleased. Before he was thirty he had all Great Pines in his confidence. His father was content that he should remain some years idle, and sent him travelling. He sought out the graves of his Helvetius and Machiavelli. Came home muttering, "Aimer c'est avoir besoin." Came home with a great amount of thought about his brows, Fanny perceived. She becomes still shyer of him. He has kept his fine form, but he has lost his good looks. His looks are now sometimes formidable, especially, it seems, in daylight, which makes visible even the recesses of our spirits and throws all facial ugliness into such

terrible relief. Twilight and the lights of lamp and candle appear to help him, and lend softness. He was at the point when the pace of life is said to be quickest, and Fan thought it was certainly too quick for her. The very simplicity of her manner of dress, which was childlike, seemed to point the difference between them, and emphasise that he was far beyond her. She wore gowns in the Greek way, hanging straight from the shoulders. And, said Bristol, she has the simple outline of Greek beauty which suggests little beyond itself, whereas I have seen faces, but mostly of men, with all the colour and darkness of the universe in them.

Gossip went that he was making advances over the wall. Nothing so misinformed. She was really not in his thoughts. He was often indeed at The Elms, but it was to consult Seer Mossman's books. He was encouraged, and came most willingly, for he found many a book that gave him help. He did not know how Fan used to dust them for him and make sure that all the new books were cut. They were really her enemies, and perhaps she was polishing weapons for him to kill her love. But she trusted, and when she looked timidly into the strange books she thought she saw nothing that would cause him to forsake her. "Men must read," she said, "and we are not everything to them." Yet she tended her ringlets with care for his sake, and went to the uplands to let the spring wind sow roses in her cheeks.

Although he considered her father a hopeless dreamer, who had spent his life in a haze, young Bristol, not yet become wholly disingenuous, found a certain fascination in that ecstatic old man.

"You say, my son, that we have taken the God of the Jews and made Him cosmopolitan. Is this the latest? And yet I will surprise you into a belief in God, that Idea elusive, fugitive to be caught, perhaps never except the way art catches an Idea just to let it go. It is good to have doubts in youth—and never let Fan hear it—but good also as you grow older to sail west towards the sun, I think!"

"It sinks," said young Bristol, "and rises and sinks."

Seer Mossman was not listening, but looking intently into the air. He was tall and meagre with a Roman face, and a white mane falling to his shoulders.

"The cross of my Lord," he said, with a fine gesture, "makes the sign *plus* (+)—O irony!—when it meant the subtraction from the world of its sublimest. Unless it was *plus* to mark a new stage in the frightful sum of addition in which the world counts up its iniquities!"

"Its iniquities," said Bristol, "are to be understood, I have heard, and not shrieked over."

Fan watched him pass down. The dull months were passing, passing unrelieved into dull years. Her father was absorbed in his own room, and she remained lonely, knitting, sewing, turning pale.

How love, whose heart is red like rowans, uses a false pigment in hopes to delude the world! She tended her garden and brought up the spring's tulips. He did not know that for the sake of their childhood she saw that the roots of her forget-me-not had sap. "Tuts, tuts!" said Mother Rachel, "d'ye think he's forgotten ye?" It was now the gossip of the towns that she was love-sick, but that he was not heeding her.

CHAPTER III

ADVANCES WITH APPREHENSION BECAUSE THE ROAD IS GETTING STRANGE

It was not, indeed, that he had become indifferent either to Fanny's looks or to his own. The muslin blinds were not too dense to prevent him having a sight of her. Besides, he knew the importance of looks. A man's vanity, he said, is often his salvation. Vain of his person he may preserve it from lust and drink. I have often seen a vice thus changing place with a virtue. Many a time he presented himself before his mirror and told himself frankly that if he was not ugly he was at least strange. But he of all men knew that a face which repels may also attract. It must be so, he thought, for Fan is undermining her very life to possess me. And then, of course, when Jessie Ring came he had a fresh instance of it. Lo, such a face displays many a hidden wonder which a beauty that is superficial can never display. Bristol studied his own face persistently. He said it was all the help he ever received. It was scarcely vanity. When he looked in his mirror it was as if he saw another face than his own, he said it so dispassionately. He studied it as if he had been a painter, indeed more carefully

—every line of it. His hair, which was dark and plenteous, almost shone at night like jet. What a transformation when the lamps and candles were brought in! He spent hours at the glass noticing his weaknesses, and trying to get rid of them. He watched the compression of the lips, the fall of the brows, the profile, half profile, those strange starry eyes, everything that could influence or allure. I can suppose a painter saying, “Do you see Bristol’s face? It is, if you will excuse me putting it in a painter’s way, night mixed with dawn. Here we have the tints and universal pigment of things.” And, indeed, it was one of the remarkable faces of this century. Bristol described it in another way. Our portrait painters, he said, might get weary, you know, if every human face were like Jesus Christ’s.

He began to put away the poetry of youth and other childish things. He was afraid he might turn maudlin, and he began to curb himself really well. Perhaps his wisdom was affected, but it was an affectation worth having. The world thinks there is much need of halters and bridles, he said. I agree with the world. That he had a fierce struggle with himself, there can be no doubt. He, too, had the ravin of youth till he made thought trample on feeling. Man, he said, stands like a point of exclamation in the universe. But I will be something more. I will take something to peer at, this human heart, for instance. And I see already that sin has much wit, even humour and imagination, but that virtue

has no jokes. He was going to become a refiner and sifter of human nature, but he had a hard task to first sift and refine himself. I will be the modern Faust, he said, an actual living Faust.

It was this struggle with himself which appeared in his face, and troubled Fan. She said that he had a strange power of changing his expression, and that by the lamplight he appeared quite different from what he did in the day. It may have been her idle fancy. But there was something true in it. If there had been nothing in it another woman, Jessie Ring, would not have noticed the same strangeness. And, of course, when Jessie came Bristol had already grown enormously in power. But while Fanny turned back almost afraid, Jessie was allured to explore further. "These eyes!" she said. She felt that he must have a wonderful submarine element in him. But a girl like Jessie hardly knew, at least till later, that all human consciousness is sea-like, cushioning many a villainous reef. She did not know, who of us does? that that was going to be discovered in her own case. She simply said, "Still he fascinates and draws. I can prepare for him, know what I shall have to conquer and suffer. Yet by the lamplight when his smile lies soft, oh, I *could* almost run from him!"

Bristol began to know that the two fatal women were thus exercised about him, and to profit by it. And then we have comedy. How, supposing she ever won him, each of these women had prepared

herself for such a see-saw of love and aversion is difficult to explain. Mrs. Crippen could throw no light upon it. Probably each thought she had sufficient power to recreate him. At any rate only these two perceived dimly his curious nature. Great Pines and Little Pines saw nothing of it at all, and became easy victims. But then so did the two women in spite of their penetration.

"Tut, tut," said Mother Rachel, "stop scaldin' yoor blu e'en. D'ye think he's forgotten ye? Not he. What would he glow'r through the muslins at, if not at ye? The way to win 'im's to hold yoor head as high. I've aye said yoor forther's a daft man, but I never knew he was so daft as he is. Yes-treen, I stoppit at the door to hear what he was sayin' to the lad, and 'stead o' talkin' 'boot yoo he was talkin' dreams and daft confoosions. Hist, heartie, if yoor mother had been 'live it had been different."

She was Fanny's consoler and confessor, and Fanny had long surrendered. She had been the most terrible as well as the kindest of nurses. And her control over the whole household had been of so long duration that to dispute it never occurred to any but an ignorant newcomer among the underlings. Yet Seer Mossman hardly knew that he was living under a female despotism—"That special visitation of the Lord," as Calvin, with unmeant humour, calls it. And Fanny, although she knew, assented heartily because Mother Rachel had become indispensable. As Fanny grew into early

tremulous womanhood, her old nurse had too swift an eye to miss the pathetic manœuvres of young love. Did she not find her one day by the bed of violets in unexplained tears? And then that evening by the great bed of lilies! Her father was walking near, but *he* perceived nothing. He was saying, "Behold the lilies of the field!" Fan was gathering them, and as she stole off Mother Rachel, although at the top windows, heard the sigh. And as Fan mounted the stair she thought she had no audience when she said, but only above her breath, "Oh, I'll be a flower-girl before I'll bear it longer!"

"Lilies! who'll buy 'em?" cried Mother Rachel, in mockery as she came running out, "fresh plucked to-day! Pooh, lass, stop scaldin' yoor blu e'en this lordie's night."

Fan blushed in embarrassment and anger, and then gave way to her tears. But it was time to go to school, for she had a class of village children at church, and the bell was already ringing. Mother Rachel rallied her, and said as she handed a Bible, "Keep your head high. It's writ here, 'Blessed be the meeklies.' Humph! the Lord Himself wasn't so meekly often. May I be forgiven such blasphemous talk. But some folks suld be tousled!"

Fanny's text for that night was, "Behold the lilies!" And she was naïvely taking a bunch of them to make an object lesson for the children. After lesson was over she would divide the bouquet. She was the cause of many a jealousy among her

fellow workers in the school, because her ways were so winning that half the children wished to enrol as her pupils, and there were continually deserters from the other classes. Her own class had in consequence become so large that it had got beyond her control, and on plea of ill-health she reduced the number to six. And these six were envied by all the rest, not so much for the superior quality of the spiritual instruction they received as because they were annually invited to The Elms for high tea, and afterwards got fun among the apple trees. Two of them were brought, except on frosty nights, all the way from Little Pines to hear whatever simple thing Fan had to say to them. Bristol used to chaff her on these pious exercises, and observed that it was a new instance of the truth of that saying of Helvetius, that people take to religion sometimes out of *ennui*. In Fan's case, thought Bristol, it may be broken love. At any rate, she was not to meet her six candidates for heaven that night. The parish bell of Great Pines was ringing—it was almost ringing in, as she came hurrying from The Elms. A few paces brought her to the Rookery gate with its old ivy tower at one side.

"Who goes there?" cried a voice, which sent the blood to her face.

She stopped and looked up. Bristol was leaning out of the tower, and holding on to a red hawthorn branch. He shook it, and the blossoms fell on her. It was the third week in May, and the birds were all out.

"Oh, I'm so late," said Fan. It was the first time she had spoken to him since April.

"Come on in," said Bristol, in the boyish tone he sometimes affected, "I'll be down in a minute."

She hardly knew what she did as she stood waiting. The bell was ringing in.

"I must go," she said, as he opened the wide gate.

"'Wide is the gate,'" he was saying, in the strangest voice from the other side of it.

"I must go," she said, blushing like the hawthorn.

"Gad! the lilies. What are *they* for?"

She faltered, and was asking herself if she was ashamed to say. He smiled, and she was fixed where she stood as the bell stopped.

"Oh, let me——" she cried weakly.

"In!" he added for her, but with a glance she mistook.

She knew it was only a ribbon of a smile that was holding her back. But he was irresistible. The bell gave another toll like a warning, at which she started. But if she had obeyed, this book could not have been written. He was playing with the lilies, and chaffing her on her piety.

"Your father says it's good to be—to be a stayer-away."

"Oh, does he?" she said, surprised and half relieved, "but he likes me to go."

"*Aren't* they fine! Our Harry doesn't produce anything like them with all his big boasts. We have only the rooks, and they're black."

Caw, caw. The rooks were busy. She was now within the gate, and she stopped her ears to the children's voices which came from the school a quarter of a mile away. They were in a group outside the churchyard, and were singing against the sun. She heard the first line, "Lead, kindly light." Was she mad? She should be singing it with them. Bristol took up the tune, and sang as they walked under the evergreen oaks and the elms. She went with him while her heart was being torn in two by the two great passions of love and religion. He was thinking of Jessie Ring. Love, he thought, will dominate death and faith, and will make himself, at least for a moment, supreme. She tried to put in a feeble line along with him, but the words scattered—

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

He was walking slightly in advance of her, tall and vigorous, and the evening light helping him.

"Do you remember when we used to play hide-and-seek among these bushes?"

"Yes," she said, wondering at his tenderness; "but I really think I must go."

"No, you don't," he said.

She slipped her Bible into her pocket. Oh, sweet denial! From that moment she became irreversibly his.

"I've got some one to show you," he said half in inquiry.

"Who is it?"

"Miss Ring. You've perhaps heard about her. I've been busy with her brother Paul for almost a month. He's going to be a fixture here, you know. I wanted to see how another man's brain works, and I was tired doing nothing. Father objects to it. People think I'm paid, but I'm not."

She said nothing but "Oh."

"They're orphans. Miss Ring is going to live with Dr. Muster. We both promised their grandmother to look after them."

They had arrived at the door where the blind Bristol was sitting in the sun. The sound of voices was heard in the dining-room, coming through the low-built windows, which were open.

"I think I'll go, late as it is," said Fan.

"Is that you, Fan?" asked the blind man, eagerly. "We never see anything of you now. Ah, I say 'see' through habit. I see nothing. And what has come over my friend? We never see him either."

He stretched out both arms to receive her, and drew her to his knees.

"Father's always at books, you know," she said.

"Jacob, what fine scent is this?"

"Lilies," said Fan, with her eyes drooping.

Bristol stood watching. She was almost no

longer a maid, but her face had kept its sweetness. Her hair was auburn, slightly faded. She was somehow his because of their long childhood together. She half rebuked him by her simplicity, and he thought of the strange world he had been creating for himself since they played together. Certainly compared with the fulness of his brain she was emptiness itself. Jessie Ring and Paul were looking on at the window, and Fan already guessed they were laughing at the sight of a full-grown woman with a bunch of lilies sitting on an old man's knee. Paul Ring looked especially roguish and inquiring. Jessie, who was playfully holding on to one of his ears, finally burst out laughing. She might have been pardonably vain of her figure which was superb and made Fan's look commonplace beside it. Rich dark tresses like "drapery" to subdue the eyes. She asked her brother if he thought Fanny wore stays.

"Such frights you see going about!"

"She's a crow," said Paul.

"Come out and we'll see her. This is the Miss Mossman, is it?"

"Look here, Jessie," said Paul, as they came out, "I hate Bristol, and I'm dashed if he's going to lord it over *me*!"

"Quiet, silly. *Isn't* she rustic?"

Fan had to answer "No" to almost every one of Miss Ring's questions. Miss Ring had apparently seen a great deal.

"La!" said Fan, in her worst rusticity, "I've not been out of Great Pines!"

Miss Ring smiled derisively, as if her interest in Miss Mossman was already over, and Fan thought of the mistake she had made in coming in with Bristol. She blushed before Paul, who looked inquiringly at her, and then turned off to whistle and chip wood.

"Who is whistling, if you please," asked the blind Bristol, sternly.

Paul walked away with a "curse you" under his breath. He had already lost half his liberty. "I might as well be at school," he said to his sister, "and I'm dashed if I'll stand it." But it was always, "Quiet, silly." He went that afternoon to the uplands above the Rookery, and there lay chafing under the restraint of the new guardian that had been allotted him, unconscious of all that was actually brewing below and that very closely affected himself. But he had his own secret. He had got as high as the point where there is a view of Ludd through the trees, lying in a summer drowse. And then he saw a girl about a hundred yards off among the dry grasses beyond the wood. That was Maud Whipper, Miss Pilking's niece, come to meet him from Little Pines. And he is *nineteen*, and so is she, and you may leave them alone, for that is the age of wisdom.

CHAPTER IV

IS LIKE A CONFSSIONAL BOX

So FAR as Bristol was concerned nothing better could have happened than the way in which Mrs. Badcock had chosen to show her confidence in him. Great Pines looked on approvingly, with of course the exception of Lawyer Crack and Banker Brind, who had never been consulted. People began to go to The Rookery for advice. Never such an obliging gentleman, and all for nothing!

"Lookee here, my friend," said Banker Brind, "you'll wait in vain to get that lady's affairs to put in order, and I'll never feel her money either. It's a mystery who's managing the thing."

"That's true," said Lawyer Crack, "and Muster's very little in it, and *we're* not in it. Bristol gives advice for nothing, they say. Booh! He'll not be long at that game. And I never heard he studied law. But he's deep as Ludd, and I don't know what's at the bottom o' the one or t'other."

Meantime Great Pines congratulated itself on possessing a young burgess of such public spirit. Even Little Piners came to lay their little difficul-

ties before him. No more fees to Lawyer Crack, who used to rule the roast in both towns. Bristol became surprised at the number of people who sought his advice on all sorts of personal matters. One brought another till he had quite a small following. And he began to know the twists of their characters. Nay, he was amazed to find his footsteps sooner or later in crime. It was not long before he had a batch of secrets labelled with the names of their owners. He had a peculiar power of eliciting confession, for he was able to suggest what he saw lurking on the lips of his visitors, and so draw them to completer unveilings. It was his delight. He said it was his privilege. He made these excursions into private lives, not because he loved paltry gossip, but because the human turmoil in any consciousness interested him greatly. After every one was in bed, and he had been once more relieved of the thick-headed Paul Ring, he used to draw out from a little cabinet in his own room his list of entries—Miss Pilking's secret, Mr. Paul Ring's secret, Dr. Muster's secret, &c. And the fascination did not consist in possessing these individual secrets but in watching how they became involved and interwoven, how they grew together almost organically. Want to know the big world? he said. Come here to Great Pines. Such a hornet's nest! He meant it to be a sort of apprenticeship for himself before he attempted things on a larger and more purely diplomatic scale. I must

peer at men, he said—and at women. And if he had not himself made a contribution to the ugly fungus-growth he saw at his feet, who knows what great part he might have played in universal politics? But he could not keep his own feet very clean, and he tumbled into the bog with the rest of them. His history becomes almost piquant on that score.

The usage of the Roman Catholic Church was his special admiration, and he envied the confessors. To hear the working of spiritual clocks in the silence and twilight of a church! To be a fisher of men he thought certainly a high calling. Only, be sure you have well-barbed hooks! There is one thing that interests me, he said, and that is the human embroilment. He knew already that almost all sorts of mistakes are irremediable, and that after confession and in spite of it, almost in ridicule of it, the weight of the burden is doubled when two begin to share it. He said there were wounds not got in battle, sabre cuts of deep-going iniquity. He liked to handle them. He had seen souls that had set themselves up as targets for the short range and the long, and had become simply riddled. For him this was a merely intellectual interest. He never would have grown shrill over your iniquity. He would have only explained it to you. You are thus and thus, he would have said, and then have left you alone. He said, Sin and you have exactly doubled my interest in you. For it means that in the interval between your state of innocence and

of corruption you have been at drama of some sort. If your life is poor in incident, do something the world calls wrong, and you will have incident enough!

Of course he could not have known that he was going to be more than a mere spectator of such incidents in the lives of others, that even the most ordinary of the passions were going to claim him as prey, and that he was not, any more than the others, to be exempt. At any rate, he felt a peculiar pleasure in being able to guess the gestures of all the passions and their contortions—Desire hot at the lips, and Love with martyr's mouth, and Beauty frenzied at his own collapse. He thought little of the things that interest most people. He simply sat in his room and laid his hand cruel in the secret places of the human soul until he became a terror even to himself. Perhaps his confiders were oftener in his thoughts than the confiders supposed. They at least absorbed a considerable part of his day.

For instance, Miss Pilking came in one morning. She was a deformed little woman with a face like a parrot's, and was generally complaining about the rheumatism in her fingers. She used to hold them up for inspection. "These poor silly old fingers, look at them—if they're not sore!" In fact, they were like a parrot's claws, bent and twisted. Miss Pilking wore Quaker hats, and had them always slightly tilted to one side. No wonder that the children called her a witch. She was never without a

stick, and her gloves were invariably cotton. At church she had a sprig of wild thyme for a smelling bottle. She was, indeed, the main curiosity of Little Pines, and might have been seen any day driving through it in her donkey-cart. Efforts, all alike fruitless, had been made with admirable persistence to discover her personal history. Only a man like Bristol could get hold of a thing or two, which became marvellously important later on. The children used to run from her. But whenever they had a chance they beat her donkey, and the boldest of them used to hang behind on the donkey-cart to give her annoyance. Her whip always missed them, and they came laughing behind. She had arrived one day suddenly in Little Pines with her niece, Maud Whipper, and had lived ever afterwards in seclusion. Even Maud had to suffer on account of her aunt's eccentricity.

"Oh, there's daft Pilking's niece!" the children used to cry, and run away.

Yet Maud was adored by those of them who got to know her, and gradually became popular. She gave them fun many a day on the village swing.

Aunt Pilking went about with lips close pressed, as if in symbol of taciturnity. Speculation was rife as to a certain bulged condition of the pocket of her dress. What might that mean? "It's raw potatoes for her rheumatism," some of the women said. "Carry potatoes in your pocket?—oh, you'll get quits o' rheumaticks. She knows that." At church

or at market Miss Pilking invariably appeared with this swollen condition of pocket. "It's barley-sugar," said the children, "and she chews it in church, the old greed!" But even Maud did not know what this packet contained. Every night her aunt opened a deep press and deposited it there. She slept with the press key under her pillow. Every morning, before Maud had wakened, she took the packet out and carried it with her all day. It was reserved for Bristol to discover what it was, and in a curious way.

Maud felt her aunt to be as much a curiosity as other Little Piners did, and was secretly ashamed of her. She had lived with her from early infancy, because, like Paul Ring, she was an orphan. Aunt Pilking had brought her up in disbelief and condemnation of marriage.

"I was never for marrin' myself, and ye'll not do it, lass."

Maud began to chafe under her aunt's tyranny. Miss Pilking was growing jealous, and deplored Maud's beauty. She kept strict watch on her. "I could give her a potion," she said, "to take away some o' her good looks. She can afford to lose some." And she felt in her bulged pocket as if she had there something suitable for her purpose. She schooled Maud into a distrust of the inhabitants of Little Pines. When questioned about her aunt, Maud knew how to avoid giving confidences.

"Ye'll keep shy o' the young men; ye bad

girl," said her aunt. "Your mother told me to watch ye."

Miss Pilking possessed only one small looking-glass, about the size of the human face. But she shut it in a box and seldom allowed Maud to use it, in case it might make her turn vain. So that Maud had often to gather up her tresses without help of a glass. Her aunt took her to school and brought her back. Even at *eighteen* there was no sign of this irritating despotism giving way. The advent of Paul Ring had been cause of the first serious quarrel between them.

"But I will speak to him," said Maudy, in tears. "What's the harm, Auntie?"

"Eh, eh! ye bad girl, I'll get law on ye!"

In an evil moment Miss Pilking had left Little Pines on a business errand of her own. Maud and Paul had met. It was down by Ludd's Beach, where the fine larches are. They looked at each other, and the sequel was told in a series of confirming glances. Dialogue? As if they needed it! Love, look you, is a most practised hand at dumb alphabet.

He gave her pansies, and she knew that was for thoughts. She was a wonderful fresh maid, and love was busy with them. How he runs with messages, fleet-foot runner! How he casts an aureole about us to make us look a moment immortal! And how, even when he is dead within us, our bodies have become his bright hearse! They tell

me Paul was not clever. What does love care? Beauty cares not a whit for knowledge.

But Miss Pilking caught them down by the lake shore, and their kisses were disturbed by her rickety laugh. There was to be no more peace for Maud.

"Ye're a conceited hussy," she said, "and d'ye think the boys are in love with ye?"

Whether all the boys were in love with her was another affair. At any rate, it was the case with Paul. They had even gone a-boating on Ludd on an afternoon in that wonderful May.

"In two years I'll be free, I think," she said to him.

"And so will I, O Maudy!" he said.

Miss Pilking thought it was time to appeal to Bristol. It was against her principles to take any one into confidence, but here was an exception. "They meet, they meet!" she said. It was the first time she had put her foot within The Rookery. Bristol was surprised. Whew! he said, this is becoming a confessional box! And then aloud, "Take a chair, Miss Pilking." But she refused to sit down, and began to beat the floor with her stick.

"Well, young man," says she, "it's a strange thing that an old wife should come to *you* for advice. Just look at these poor silly fingers, if they're not sore!"

"Can Dr. Muster do nothing for you?"

"Oh, it's not *that* I've come about," she said.

And then, bending towards him, she whispered,

pointing to her heart, "I've rheumatism here, you know. Had it for old years, no one suspecting." She laughed far down in her throat as old women sometimes do.

Bristol looked very steadily at her and she drew back afraid. She was almost burning to leave, but he called her forward.

"Eh, eh! What are ye lookin' at?" she said affrighted.

"I know all about you, Miss Pilking," he said, and pointed to her pocket.

"Deh!" she shrieked, "will you frighten an old wife?" and then she tried to laugh again.

"Take a chair, Miss Pilking."

"You're a danger," she said in a frenzy.

In a few minutes he was busy with Miss Pilking's secret. She collapsed before him as did so many others. He said, there is something fermenting here—brewing. Sin ferments. He saw that he could bring her to the brink of confession. She was evidently desiring it, perhaps had been desiring it for fifteen years. Such a disturbed look is not meaningless. Crime will find a voice, and when you are working among mankind it is useful to presume at least some mistakes. Miss Pilking stood aghast and refused to sit down. Her face was becoming as white as her summer shawl.

"Take a chair, Miss Pilking."

But she again refused, and kept nervously clearing her throat.

"This," he said aloud to her, "may be the very hiccough of your iniquity."

She started back, and he pointed to her pocket again.

"I assure you, Miss Pilking, I know all about it," and then he laughed good-naturedly.

"Now, I like you for *that*," she said, slightly rallied, but still in doubt. It was not to be surprised in this way that she had come to consult him.

"Quite wonderful at giving advice, they say."

"I am," he replied unperturbed; "I know all about you."

And then he simulated partnership with her, and gave many a comforting hint.

"Is that all, is that all?" he said, laughing.

She brought out the packet half-way, and then plunged it in again when she met his eyes. As Dr. Muster used to say later, his eyes were sometimes like mouths.

"Bring it out," he said impatiently.

"I'm just a daft witch," she replied trembling, "and you're not to believe me."

"I don't," he said; "let me see it." He took the packet and began to unwind its cover.

"O—oh!" she said.

"I know, I know," he replied. He had discovered a wooden case about five inches long and shaped like a bottle. He unscrewed the top while Miss Pilking looked fearfully about the room.

Many another person looked fearfully about that room.

"O—oh!" she was saying, while he heard her, "*he* knows."

"I'm a poor old rheumatic wife," she appealed to him.

He had found a bottle half full of a dim fluid. He looked at Miss Pilking where she stood in her agitation.

"Once full?" he inquired.

She gave herself up to him, while tears oozed from her dead granite eyes.

"Poison?" he inquired.

She drew back from him. "Oh, what are you saying, young man. You're a danger! Eh!"

He held it to the light. "You'll leave this with me, Miss Pilking." He further simulated friendship with her by many a comforting "We'll do it together, you know."

It was the correct stroke, because she became in consequence of it almost voluble in her confession. But now and again she drew back as if afraid, and tried to mislead him.

"Tut, tut," she interrupted, "let me go."

Yet he hoodwinked her into believing in his partnership, and it was not long before he knew that her sister Maria, Maud's mother, had drunk the other half of that bottle.

I suppose Maud is to drink the rest of it, he said inwardly.

"Oh, is that all?" he asked aloud, laughing.

"Now, now," she replied, "I do like you for that."

"Did she suffer much?"

"Hair out, teeth out, no eyelashes. Such a sight."

"How escaped detection?"

"As blind as moles."

"You are a dangerous woman, Miss Pilking."

She started back from him again.

"Well, now," she said, trying to laugh, "I'm a daft witch, and we've been talking nonsense. Give me my hair lotion, ye bad boy. Here's what I've come about. This Paul Ring that you've got and that Maud Whipper that I've got——"

"Your sister's child?" he interrupted.

"Ye—es. They meet. I say we'll have to watch *them*!"

"I am aware of that," said Bristol.

She then told him incoherently that on Maud's marriage the money that Maria had left her, and that she had taken a little—"just a little"—before the right time, was all to be surrendered. It was important to prevent a marriage, then, and she implored Bristol to keep a check on Paul. She had the strangest glitter in her eye.

"Miss Pilking, you are a strange woman. This makes people ugly," he said, holding up the bottle. "You wish to tamper with Maud to deter *him*?"

He had divined her secret. She thought by his manner that he was participating in it.

"Eh! that's it," she said. "But not poison again. These nights for fifteen years!"

"Or I could make *him* ugly," said Bristol, toying strangely with the strange woman's crime.

"That would be better," she said, and patted him on the back, "and his hair'll fall out. He's fine hair."

"Leave me, Miss Pilking."

"Oh," she said, turning from him, and whispering among her hands. "I believe I've been talking about Maria! It's a snare!"

She curtsied and left, but came back to demand her bottle and to remind him that she was a silly old wife. He told her to be gone, and locked her bottle in his cabinet.

Here, he said, is a curious sight. Look what she has discovered—that ugliness like her own is the great enemy to the eyes. She may tamper with Maud to take away the boy's pleasure in her. Her criminal habit did not stop evidently with the destruction of Maria. Shall I hand her over?

He said no, because your police sergeant is a poor psychologist. He has interest only in handcuffs, he. And I notice, he said, that crime never feels so encouraged and justified as when sent to prison, because it finds there so many representatives that it sees what a vast system it is spread like a network, irresistible, across the world. Extremely popular.

I will rather *watch* Pilking. But when he saw Paul that night fresh and ruddy he asked himself if he and Maud might be in danger. I will watch over them, he said. Young love and old crime; here we are at the rudiments of things.

Crime? He came back to Miss Pilking, and fingered the bottle again. Perhaps she is merely mad after all. But I will watch if her iniquity becomes broken-hearted, he said. Iniquity has a heart to break. It has its own strange sorrows. Aged Pilking, you may indeed poison thought, but it is more difficult to poison it off! He said he would wait. Great Pines and Little Pines would meantime know nothing of it. And it is well worth the world's while, he thought, to give crime leash, and to watch its manner of growth. Besides, I assure you, he would say, that if you are extremely good you will run less chance of Jesus being interested in you than if you are extremely bad. That, of course, is the portentous paradox of your religion. He came to peer at iniquity, and to look through the world for its "lost" things. It is what *I* am doing. And as for putting on the whole armour of God, we shall do that, I suppose, when we get to God's size. Meantime . . . a hornet's nest indeed. And he looked down into consciousness as men look for blackguard life under the sea. For me, he said, the Seven Wonders of the World they are the Seven Deadly Sins!

CHAPTER V

PERCEIVES THAT EMPTY MONEY BAGS ARE FILLED WITH BITTER COMEDY

BRISTOL was far more than a theorist. He could negotiate loans, and he lent the impecunious Lord Sother a large sum. It became an unfortunate transaction, but in at least some of its features it was well done on Bristol's part. Was Lord Sother in need of money? Your ordinary person would likely avoid him in case his lordship might ask a loan. Bristol said, Bring him to me. Embarrassed individuals are precisely the sort I wish to see. I have made a study of them, and know all the forms of their wriggling. Gossip? It is the key to many a door. If you wish to succeed in your own affairs, believe me, you ought to know somewhat minutely the affairs of other people, and especially their embarrassments and scandal. Superior people, he said, turn lofty when scandal is talked, as if you can really understand a given state of society without exploring the hidden foulness of its roots. I am extremely modern, and I see that the human entanglement is getting closer knit.

He was at his window where he was speaking across to Fan, when Lord Sother was announced. He was telling her to come over to see how far the sweet peas had come up.

"Almost on tiptoe for a flight," he was saying. "Come over this afternoon."

She blushed back her reply, and went to tell Mother Rachel.

"Did I not say it," said Mother Rachel, "since ever I did dandle yoo!"

Oh, sweet!

Meantime Bristol went down, wondering what had brought old Lord Sother, but guessing that it was the unfed condition of his lordship's purse.

Mrs. Crippen told me that if I described Miss Pilking as "the main curiosity of Little Pines," I was to be sure to say that Lord Sother and his sister, Lady Emma, were the curiosities of Great. It appears that their title was of no very ancient date, and that this, among other causes, had prevented Lady Emma finding a suitable marriage. But she decided that if she remained single her brother would have to do the same. She kept strict watch on him. A certain freedom in their manners pointed to the mushroom character of their nobility. It was whispered that while still a young man his lordship had taken holy orders, but that, having fallen into disorderly ways, he was forced to renounce a sacred profession. If any one came for spiritual advice his lordship was almost certain to push across

the port decanter for a beginning, and call for a cheery anecdote. The backsliders were sent away roaring and jovial, with a greater tendency to backsliding than ever. His lordship repudiated with vehemence the notion that his flock were greater sinners than himself, and he told them he was the worst among them. He confessed to suffering from the temptations which afflicted Saint Anthony, but in his case the visions of fair women took sometimes palpable shape. The climax came when his lordship once stopped in the middle of his sermon and proclaimed that for the life of him he couldn't proceed for thinking of Henrietta Pease down there in the third pew. There was great commotion in church when Henrietta rose and fled through a side door, followed by Lady Emma; and the excitement increased when his lordship there and then renounced his profession with many tears and confessions of sin. He was followed to the door by the affectionate remonstrances of his parishioners, who insisted on his return. But he waved farewell to them, and shook his head, calling vehemently for his own chastisement. Lady Emma followed him all over the Continent, and secretly rejoiced in his imperfect knowledge of modern languages. It meant at least one defence against the assaults of female sharpshooters. But it was at Great Pines, where they settled, uneasy in their circumstances, that Lady Emma's powers of control became so important. Although she shut herself up in her own

apartments and announced the intention of leading a devotional and nunlike life, it was understood that she knew all his lordship's going out and coming in. Janet, their maid, was commissioned to keep an eye on the manœuvres of Mrs. Crippen. "Mercy upon us!" said Mrs. Crippen to me, "what have I not suffered from that Janet!" But she admitted that Lord Sother paid her visits in her garden under pretence of an enthusiasm for horticulture. He even did planting for her with his own hand, and offered advanced views on the treatment of obstinate peas. Lady Emma saw many a promising hyacinth bulb go over the wall. Even her favourite geraniums were expatriated, and found new homes in the enemy's soil.

"My garden is a wilderness, sir."

More than once she had heard him among the shrubbery use abject forms of flattery.

"This rose, you sweet Mrs. Crippen, a mere red weed in comparison with yourself."

And then he made a posy, and said that if she and it weren't a combination he had lost taste in women and weeds. He had struggled with himself often to say that Mrs. Crippen's own weeds should point her to the decision she should take.

"I say, Edmund," said Lady Sother, in alarm at his frivolities, "you're like any grasshopper."

"It's better than being a clodhopper, Emma."

"A grasshopper's a clodhopper, sir."

"But you would never know it, madam."

Lady Emma shut herself in again with her books of devotion, but sallied forth whenever she thought events were moving at too swift a pace.

“Her eyes are diamonds, Emma.”

“Hey!” said she, “they’re first-rate watery.”

Lord Sother bowed, and admitted Emma’s score.

The truth was that Lady Emma in her sunny day, as she used to call it, had had but meagre court paid to her. And now her sunny day had passed under the wet skies of misfortune. Her brother’s extravagances had involved them in hopeless debt, and she declared herself heartbroken with him. She was a woman with a conspicuous bosom, and her face, like her brother’s, was in no immediate danger of turning too pale; wore ringlets, which she powdered and curled, or rather which her serving-maid curled and powdered for her; wore mittens also and folds of lace which a friend had sent her from Malta, and whom she persisted in calling a Knight of Malta, though he was only a merchant.

“Eh!” said Mrs. Crippen, “haven’t I seen her day after day staring over here in her laces and yellow bodice? If she’d take off her satins and lace and scour her floors, it would be wiser like.”

Perhaps the acutest suffering which the days of adversity had brought to Lady Emma consisted in various irritations connected with the instruction of a raw serving-maid in the great affairs of toilet. A mere girl of the countryside, it was hardly to be expected that Janet should possess intimate knowl-

edge of such things. She had prepared the lodge for my lord and her ladyship, and was waiting to receive them on the night of their arrival.

"Look at her hands!" exclaimed Lady Emma, "and preserve my face from them!"

Next morning she ordered the curling-tongs for her ringlets. Simple Janet went to heat the great tongs of the kitchen, and brought them smoking to her mistress.

"La, mum, take care! I've never seen 't done before," said Janet, holding up the tongs with a cloth wrapped at the handles.

"Gracious!" cried Lady Emma, turning round. "What *are* you, woman?"

"La, I'm Janet," said Janet, in confusion. "Yer la'ship asked for tongs, sure."

"Is it not touching?" exclaimed her ladyship, and then burst into a good-humoured laugh, in which Janet shared.

The worst of it was that such provocations continued, and that in spite of them Janet's place was secure. His lordship was never able to produce her wages. She remained to work havoc in my lady's wardrobe by the powerful manner in which she handled my lady's clothes. Lady Emma sighed for the old days when Baxter was her maid, and in moments of forgetfulness she used to address Janet as Baxter, to Janet's surprise. Sometimes the fiction was willingly kept up.

"I say, Baxter, you'll wash me these laces."

Baxter took the laces, but put so much more force than skill into her washing of them that they were returned in shreds.

"Job!" exclaimed Lady Emma, "he should have got lace done by this creature! What would my poor Knight of Malta say?"

And then she tossed the rags of them into the fire.

Precept upon precept were thrown away on Baxter. The next washing of lace was no less heart-breaking. The orders were to put it in a bowl, and let it steam in the oven. The lace was duly put in the oven, but Baxter forgot all about it. And when her mistress made inquiries it was discovered a mere heap of yellow cinders in a dry bowl. Whereupon Lady Emma declared that her patience, like her lace, was now evaporated, and demanded Baxter's wages.

"Whages! What whages?" inquired my lord out of the inclement spirituous mists which ordinarily enveloped him.

"Baxter's wages."

"Whages!" replied my lord, and rolled off, shrugging his huge shoulders.

Janet's position at The Lodge became more impragnable than ever. His lordship's last loan was already exhausted, and Banker Brind had given notice that there were to be no further advances. It became necessary to look elsewhere. In his perplexity he turned to Bristol, who was reputed wealthy. With the exception of an insignificant portion Lord Sother's property was actually all mort-

gaged. But he endeavoured to enjoy as long as possible the vanishing sensation of being a lord of the soil. His one strip of unburdened land in the neighbouring shire was like an island for him in rough seas, but it was going to be submerged like the rest. No one knew how the debts accumulated except, of course, Lord Sother, who had a suspicion that if money begets money, debt breeds debt. But he did not say it in that way. He said they were breeding like rabbits, and he always referred to them as "my rabbits." There seemed to be no shooting them down. At least, Banker Brind had proved a poor sort of gamekeeper, and my lord decided to hand over the rest of the preserve to Bristol. That his new gamekeeper had all the instincts of the chase Lord Sother saw at the first glance. But his wild game was going to be snared at a very costly price. It was not to be a mere affair of six per cent.; it was going to be nine, with final reversion of the land, perhaps. Lord Sother was amazed, and said old Brind was a good Samaritan in comparison.

"Eh, eh, you coin collectors, I know you," said his lordship, with a leer. But Bristol offered the money immediately, and in a slump, while it was Brind's practice to dole out instalments at intervals so long and in such puerile amounts that my lord said his sensations were those of a man whose breeches are bursting every step he takes. There was nothing for it but to make terms with the new gamekeeper.

"Demmed conditions, sir!"

"But the risk, you know, my good lord."

"Dem the risk! The rabbits are not so numerous after all, and you've got the ground to let 'em run on. My ancestors' furrows, man!"

"Yes," replied Bristol, who had improvised himself into a money-lender; "but the rabbits have appetites and philoprogenitive instincts, and the furrows may prove as unprofitable to me as they have evidently been to you, my lord."

Lord Sother rolled his eyes. Hardly any one would have supposed him even to be a fallen aristocrat. He was more like an old cabman in particularly indigent circumstances. Or at least a stranger would have said Baron Sother of Sotherfields chooses a peculiar incognito. Many a cabman would blush to wear raiment of that sort, and might display even a more respectable toothpick.

"Peh, peh!" said his lordship, driven to make a settlement on any terms. "I'll do it. While there's life there's jinks. It begins to be sunny. I'll drink to your future, boy. I suppose you handle all papa's cash. No rabbits here, eh?"

Bristol was only too willing, and the port was brought. Lord Sother, of course, could hardly be expected to know that Bristol had decided to lend him money belonging to Paul and Jessie Ring. Bristol did not trouble himself greatly about technical details. But such a mistake was one of the petty worries that awaited a man like him. And it

is safe to presume that it mattered nothing to his lordship where the money came from, provided that it did come. Meantime, his thirst was, as usual, uncontrollable, and he drank glass upon glass. Bristol, looking gravely on, diluted a few drops with water. In food and drink there was never fasting saint more sparing. Half the human *bêtise*, he said, is the result of overeating.

"I see," he said, looking at his lordship, who was now in the heat of his wine, "that a drunkard has need of corks like other people. Otherwise all his liquor would run off at once. Cork, sort of removable fence for forbidden waters, too removable, eh, my good sot?"

"Thash all ri' !" said his lordship, with a humorous leer. He was beginning to beam, and in his returning joviality he forgot how precisely the rabbits had been shot down that morning. But his hand was not too shaky to sign the deed. "Peh, peh! a good morning's work, boy. Made a big ba-ba-bag, eh? I'll go home and think how to ba-ba-bag *my* game."

Bristol put the deed in his cabinet, and his lordship went home with his cheque, which he had the satisfaction of cashing at Banker Brind's. On the road he surprised the children of the village by tossing shillings and sixpences to them. As he passed down the main street of Great Pines everybody knew he had got another loan, and came out to see him. The old lord had never felt quite so happy

for years. "Houp! houp!" he said as he jaunted along; "it's all a merry-go-round, with pretty girls on the horses and in the boats. It's a miwy go ra-ound!"

Meanwhile, his own head was going round, and it was time to find refuge within his own gate. Mrs. Crippen was at her window.

"Mim," said he, looking up and reeling back, "it's a miwy go ra-ound!" Mrs. Crippen watched him fall, and ran to help him.

"Mercy on us! if we're not all sinners," says she in the midst of his abortive cooings, while Lady Emma prepared to make a descent on them both from the high garden.

CHAPTER VI

BAITS ANOTHER HOOK

BUT of all the secrets that Bristol wrung from his confiders, perhaps Dr. Muster's was the most important. It was not so horrible as Miss Pilking's, but the possession of it gave Bristol a power over Dr. Muster and then indirectly over Paul and Jessie that he would not otherwise have had. It certainly doubled his power over Paul. Jessie, indeed, had already come under his influence in a more piquant way. Whatever was strange in him only added new power to his fascination. "He is not beautiful," she said, "but I have succumbed already." Also, the knowledge that she had a rival brought, of course, the crisis to its pitch. That featureless Fanny Mossman, a mere product of Great Pines, as commonplace as its butter and cheese! Jessie had travelled. She saw that Bristol was European, a man fit to go anywhere, and able to adapt himself in a hundred ways. He had wealth, and power of brain, and scorn in plenty. He can weave meshes and twist cords for enemies. When

he spoke, only a quarter of his thought was expressed. She was allured to explore such a mind.

A strange story was already abroad. It was said that she and Bristol had had a wonderful conversation in The Rookery garden. And the fact that it had taken the form of poetry, as was reported, heightened anxiety, and left a painful impression. Mrs. Crippen guaranteed the verbal accuracy of her version of this conversation, but she admitted that she did not understand a word of it. Jessie, it seems, was on the Rose Terrace, and had strung some roses together on a skein of the silk of her needlework. She held it up to Bristol, and said, smiling, "This is a rosary!" He was startled by her phrase, and charmed. He loved a good phrase. And if I could gather even half of what must have been his daily speech, I would feel rich. He looked inquiringly at Jessie.

"A rosary—Love's rosary?" he asked, "or Beauty's?"

She turned, and laughed, and plucked another. Certainly it was a thing Fan never could have done. Jessie went the round of the garden with him, while Paul was learning his lessons indoors. She had a trailing yellow gown which swept the lawn. It was a wonderful June night, and the blackbirds were busy. She robbed the flower-beds, and pelted him with buds. She little knew that all the time he was studying the botany of her own soul. "I know, I know," he was saying. "Sin takes care of his own

seedlings and sows his *nux vomica* heart deep to make the soil palpitate. She has tremor, this woman; I shall have trouble with her!"

That evening Jessie, to Paul's disgust, dressed herself in roses, and sat down to dinner. She had covered her gown with them, red and pink, and had put a trailing garland on her head.

"You're a silly fool!" said Paul.

"No, no," said Bristol; "she's a walking rosebush."

Evidently she has fantasy, he was thinking, and fantasy must often be fantastic.

They felt safe in the keeping of such a guardian. At least Jessie did. Dr. Muster seemed of second importance, and she relieved the dulness of his home by frequent visits to The Rookery. Perhaps she knew that Fan was keeping watch from her own side. Gradually Fan became aware that there was an interloper; and she was all the more aroused when she remembered her encounter that May night. He was evidently not quite indifferent to her. She had given up her Bible class to please him. But she began to find in her heart many a thing she had never suspected to be there—hate even, and new funds of love, and jealousy in plenty. The two women are indeed drawing near him, and near each other! The nets are getting thrown. He sits silent, and watches, and is, indeed, half angry at their approach. But his vanity was finally aroused. If he ever loved them, it was only to in-

crease their love for him. It is the cause of half your marriages. *He* knew it. Bristol never really took the initiative, although, because of their childhood together, he never quite broke away from Fan. But when he saw this rivalry he became excited, and then nervous lest it should diminish and disappear; he rather set about trying to increase it. Apart from its personal value to himself, it was infinitely interesting. But there is a great difference between getting a caress and giving one. A caress is sometimes given in order to get it returned with double force and beauty. I suspect it was his method. And he had brought Fannie and Jessie together for a purpose best known to himself. They love me, do they? Hm! Let them go on, then; it will be better that each of them should let the other see it. Meantime I stand by.

Yet, while he supposed himself to be dispassionately studying them both, he was himself being drawn two diverse ways by the commonest passion in the world. Even already, in order to conciliate Jessie, he begins to relax slightly his tyranny over Paul. It was only after he was in possession of Dr. Muster's secret, which caused Paul and Jessie to fall more completely into his own hands, that the danger of losing control over them both was over, and that he was able to become more aggressive.

Dr. Muster's secret came out in this way. After Miss Pilking's revelation of Paul's love for her niece, Bristol set about retrieving lost time. He

felt particularly piqued that Paul had been able to conceal so well that giddy gesture of young love. He had told Miss Pilking that he knew what was going on, but that had not been true. At any rate his guardianship was going to be no farce, whatever Dr. Muster's was going to be. Bristol was the worst man Mrs. Badcock could have found, because in the matter of a guardianship he would be certain to think more of his rights than of his duties. And he was not so much alarmed for Paul's future, handicapped as it might be by an indiscreet and early marriage, as incensed against Paul's hitherto successful duplicity.

He came to consult with Dr. Muster. But Dr. Muster, whose good-nature was as well known in Great Pines as was his bald head or cloth gaiter, wished to let the boy have his way. He smiled good-humouredly when he said he had often wondered what took Paul every other afternoon in the direction of Little Pines. But now the cat was out of the bag. Eight miles, sixteen miles, that was no distance for such an errand. Love laughs at mileage.

"At what hour is this?" asked Bristol, conscious of having been unusually asleep in the matter of Mr. Paul Ring's secret.

"In the afternoon when I'm consulting," said Dr. Muster, pointing to the street; "but they go up to the heights too, else I've forgotten how we used to do the thing in *our* young days!"

"Well, we must see about this," said Bristol.

"Oot!" replied the gay doctor, "he's giving you a good example. You must hurry up yourself, man. Bless me, a midwife would starve in Great Pines. I don't know whether 'tis the fault of the lassies or the lads."

Bristol made a gesture in sign of irritation.

"Maud's an excellent girl," continued Dr. Muster, "though I'm afraid Paul will find Aunt Pilkington worse baggage than any mother-in-law."

"I think he will," said Bristol, inwardly.

"*She'll* lay down the law, and I suppose that's why mothers-in-law get their name."

Bristol had but a poor opinion of Dr. Muster's jokes, and took no pains to conceal it.

"It's all a piece of tomfoolery," said he, urging objections, "and as his guardian, I refuse to allow it to go on. This young fool's present business is to pass his examination. He's only *nineteen*, and nobody knows if they'll be so very rich after all."

"Oh, no fear of that," said Dr. Muster; "why, when are you and Fanny—or is it going to be Jessie——"

"None of that," said Bristol, with a touch of anger and a movement of his great head to the left.

Dr. Muster should stop in time. "You know," said he, unheeding, "a young fellow'll do anything to win his girl, and quite right too. That's all about it, and I'm for taking his part. These chicks laugh at all warnings, and they wouldn't be chicks

if they didn't. I remember when I wanted to marry, there is nothing I would have stopped at!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bristol, looking steadily for a moment at Dr. Muster.

Now, Great Pines had once been as perturbed over Dr. Muster's case as it subsequently became over Bristol's own. But that was long ago, in Bristol's boyhood. He used to hear his father speak of it.

"There's nothing he'll not do," continued Dr. Muster, unsuspecting. "He'll play hide and seek with you and me, and depend upon it in such a game it's the young 'un that wins. Leave him alone. It's the best experience he could have, and it would be a charity any way to rid Maud of that little tyrannical aunt."

"I don't see it," said Bristol, with emphasis, "and I'll not agree."

"Now, look ye here," said Dr. Muster, taking him familiarly by the watch-chain, "it's surely the most natural thing in the world. She's a fine girl, and he's a fine boy. Whose business is it? It's only ours to see that the thing is rightly done. And depend upon it, we'll be pushing him wrong if we thwart him. I for one won't be a party to that. I say there's almost nothing a young chap'll stop at when he's in that state, if he's a young chap worth his meat."

"Oh, is there not?" asked Bristol, detecting something peculiar in Dr. Muster's manner.

"You don't know *that!*" exclaimed the simple doctor. "Yes, and in a way—in a way, I say—in a way it can be justified too."

"Well . . . perhaps . . ." interrupted Bristol, with his head raised.

"Yes," went on Dr. Muster, warming to his subject, "I'm a physician. Love, why, sir, it's a physical pain for one thing, and all the idiots be damned who try to deny it. It *will* have its anodyne."

"Well . . . perhaps . . ." said Bristol again, with his head in the same pose.

"D——, yes!" replied Dr. Muster, who seldom permitted himself an oath.

"So far as I have heard, *you* seem to have been very fortunate, doctor. *Your* obstacle—I mean your wife's first husband, you know—was overcome just at the right moment, wasn't he?" said Bristol.

Dr. Muster began to put himself on guard, and became less voluble.

"Aha!" he said, dryly, which was surely the worst exclamation he could have used.

He then looked Bristol full in the face. It was perhaps the first time he had really seen that face—alive with interrogation at that moment. The eyes were shooting their projectiles of sharp inquiry. Dr. Muster was turning giddy. Had Great Pines been asleep all these years, and was it this stripling——

"You are blushing, Dr. Muster," said Bristol, in a still small voice.

"What?" coughed out Dr. Muster, in a voice of another kind, as dry as dust rags.

"Yes, and when a man of your age blushes, it's a most interesting patch of colour," said Bristol, with extraordinary insolence, as if perfectly sure of what was coming.

"I . . . say!" gasped Dr. Muster, suddenly overtaken.

"Well, sir?" demanded Bristol, walking closer.

I had recourse to Mrs. Crippen for an account of this scene.

"Mercy upon us!" said she. "It's just a wonder a judgment didn't whelm our town for containing two such men. Ye've heard of Widow Busk? Ah, well, Widow Busk became Mrs. Muster. Muster attended Busk. *He* died, that's Busk, and they were married. They lived it down, maybe—but ah, well!" and she nodded her head as if what she omitted was more important than what she gave.

It seems that at one time Great Pines was not satisfied with the relations that existed between Dr. Muster and Widow Busk *previous* to Busk's death. And then, of course, when Busk died under Dr. Muster's hands, all sorts of disturbing conjectures were in the wind. All I know and care about, however, is that it was a curious fatality which caused Bristol to stumble on so old and forgotten an incident. It is the turning-point of this tragedy. Once in possession of Dr. Muster's secret, Bristol began to handle the others in a surer way. Like almost

every one in Great Pines, he had forgotten it, although Mrs. Crippen protested *she* had never let it slip out of her mind. "After his marriage," said she, "I wouldn't let him come nigh me."

No sooner did Bristol hear the old doctor's passionate defence of all love's Jesuitism than he asked himself why the sober doctor should be so heated on his topic. A man seldom works himself up in that manner unless personal memories or intentions are exciting him. But he remembered hearing his father talk about Widow Busk, and then he made an easy synthesis. It was, he said, a peculiarity of some men to give themselves away *after* the danger of detection was over. Crime long and successfully hid begins, look you, to talk about itself. Witness the confessions of murderers ten, fifteen, twenty years after the murder. Witness it in Miss Pilkington's case! It is the strangest thing in the world, he thought. These people are pushed not from without but from within. Secrets emigrate. Often the mere presentation of your iniquity to anybody, put in a hypothetical way, gives the semblance of the luxury and peace of justification. What strange rehearsals take place in the dim little theatres of men's minds! Words, words, said Bristol, these are the fatal things for men. Here is this Dr. Muster, long after the event, getting up to preach about it when nobody had even asked him. It was only a piece of good fortune that the uneasy man, having begun to talk about Paul, ended up by talk-

ing about himself. Only a dull brain required anything more explicit to make it see how the thing stood. In fact, after the manner of some foolish fish, Dr. Muster had taken a hook without a bait. Bristol had unconsciously thrown out such a hook, and up comes a crime like a cuttle-fish, gasping from the blackguard deeps. Ah, I see, perhaps after all the unseen bait was the worm that dieth not! At any rate, here is Dr. Muster wriggling on a bare hook, and getting hauled in steadily, steadily. Dr. Muster, the grave, the respected of Great Pines, is surely not this Dr. Muster gasping for air, and breathing only for his destruction the stifling air of conviction.

Mrs. Crippen pointed out with great truth that only a man like Bristol could have gathered out of such slender evidence matter for so serious a reckoning. But a look from him was sufficient to bring forth a confession that might have evaded the most ingenious cross-questioning. He could smile on your iniquity and lure it back from you. He let you see that the whole thing was somehow already in his hands.

He began to comfort Dr. Muster. Guardians, of all people, ought to exchange confidences. They would open their hearts to each other for the sake of their charge. They should have done it, should they not, long ago? Doubtless Dr. Muster was too sensitive and scrupulous.

"I . . . I think I am," ejaculated Dr. Muster; "I hope . . . hope so."

If so, all the better, of course. But the doctor would admit that his character as an honourable man ("an honourable man!" ejaculated Dr. Muster) had been suddenly compromised. Bristol admitted he had nothing whatever to do with the good doctor's private affairs, but the doctor would doubtless agree that this was a peculiar case. In his quality of guardian Bristol had a right to satisfy himself as to the character of his coadjutor. "A terrible man!" said Dr. Muster to himself. Why had the good doctor changed colour! Such a question, unfit in many another case, was surely fit in this. It was even a question for Great Pines, you know. And at this Dr. Muster started. The doctor would see the need of explaining himself.

"And I will . . ." said Dr. Muster, "I don't . . . I don't think I can be said to be a stained man. I can . . . well, no. It is this . . . O God!"

Bristol said nothing, but stood impassive.

"It is this," continued the doctor. "In attending my wife's first husband I did not perhaps . . . perhaps do all that I could have done . . . for . . . for another. Perhaps I did not work his case quite . . . quite so hard."

"You hob-nobbed with his disease, I suppose," replied Bristol, looking steadily.

"Well, I would not like . . . not like to say *that!*"

"Perhaps it was this way," said Bristol. "You didn't give him the pill that would have sent him

off, but you withheld the pill that would have saved him. Eh? Left the thing to Nature to do. Negative way, same motive, and same result."

"How dare you, sir!" appealed Dr. Muster, making a last effort. "How dare you!"

"Did he suffer much?" asked Bristol.

"I assure you he did not," answered Dr. Muster, in tears. "I have suffered much . . . much more myself! I am just misleading myself . . . and you. You are an honourable man, Mr. Bristol."

"You are a dishonourable man, Dr. Muster," replied Bristol, with his eyes getting larger.

"I'll do anything, I'll turn——"

"Yes, you'll turn," said Bristol, taking the word from him with scorn and extraordinary swiftness.

"You'll turn—the way milk does!"

Dr. Muster sat speechless.

"You will have to resign your guardianship, Dr. Muster."

"O God! anything but *that*—anything!" cried Dr. Muster, raising his hands to his face.

"Well, then," said Bristol, with a hollow laugh, "I'll resign."

"I'll resign, then," cried Dr. Muster, bleating it out, and holding up his hands, which were white like his lips and moving like them.

"And then I don't see, of course, how Jessie Ring can remain here. I shall not be responsible, you know."

"O pity!" cried Dr. Muster.

"No need of that," said Bristol; "you are wondering what the town will say. We can invent. Invention is the mother of what?"

He was keeping his head not so much cool as absolutely cold.

"I am afraid you have doubled my duties to Mrs. Badcock," continued Bristol; "I did not expect this. I have enough to do with the thick-headed Paul. But you are certainly not the man to leave Miss Ring with."

"I ask," replied the distracted man, venturing to raise his eyes, "only a lit-tle cle-cle-clemency. Do what you like, but leave me a-lone."

"You need have no fear of *me*," said Bristol, in the same tone he had used to Miss Pilking.

"Really?" asked Dr. Muster, in a whirl.

"Widow Busk . . . well, ah, it doesn't matter," said Bristol, walking away without making clear what he was thinking about.

It was left for Dr. Muster to inform Jessie that she was to leave for The Rookery that night. Bristol went back soliloquising on what had passed during the last half-hour. He had no intention of letting Great Pines know that Dr. Muster had ceased to be guardian to the Rings. He took a finer way than that. Hold a man's secret; it is like holding his purse for him. He meant to leave Dr. Muster, as he meant to leave Miss Pilking, meantime alone. How does it all stand? he asked himself, as he went back to The Rookery. I've got in ten minutes what

Great Pines has been sleeping over for a good many more than ten years. I am really Great Pines' doctor now—at least, I have control of the fees, surely. Jessie, Paul, even Lord Sother, Maud and Fan—I shall take care of them all, he said. I will prevent this becoming a circle of agony (*circo agonale!*) as it might very well become!

But he spent a profitable night at the little cabinet. Secrets had been emigrating to some purpose. He had there a map to the world's great, nasty fens. It was, indeed, a little pathological museum of specimens of many sorts of spiritual mange. He had made a discovery. He had discovered conscience, that strange sounding-board set up in men's brains for moral acoustics, and guaranteed to make the weakest whisper heard all over the building! But it did not perturb him. It brought him no enthusiasm. He rejoiced in it simply as a piece of science, or a fine instrument of torture. Yet a saint might have said what *he* said as he closed the little door after he had written out Dr. Muster's confession, "The moment when your iniquities begin shrivelling!" But a saint would have said it less savagely, somewhat solemnly, and perhaps in tears. And a saint would not have called out—"Bear ye one another's burdens!" in such a tone and with such a laugh as to make Paul Ring turn in his sleep.

BOOK II

STIR IN THE HORNET'S NEST

CHAPTER I

IS FULL OF EXPECTATION AND EVEN SWEET ALARM

AT the news of Jessie Ring's sudden departure from Dr. Muster's, Great Pines rose from its torpors, stared round a little, and then fell back again. But as soon as it became known that The Rookery was to be her new home, Great Pines and Little Pines as well got up once more, began to rub eyes, throw off night-caps, and make some effort to keep awake in a sort of reclining elbow posture. It all seemed so . . . delicate, you know. But, of course, her brother is also at The Rookery, and that gives us some confidence. Besides, where *could* Miss Jessie go, now that Mrs. Muster has fallen ill, so we are told, unfortunate woman? She can obviously give Miss Jessie no attention now. Mr. Bristol, moreover, is the finest gentleman alive, let Lawyer Crack say what he please and Banker Brind, too, for that matter—pair of old jealous moneybags! So that on the whole, we are all perfectly satisfied with the new arrangement, and other people should mind their own business.

Dr. Muster had, indeed, represented to Jessie

that, owing to the sudden and unfortunate collapse of his wife, it would be meantime better for her to go to The Rookery. She would receive more attention there than *they* could now promise. Jessie was surprised, and at first pleaded to remain. She would nurse Mrs. Muster. But the good doctor shook his head—what! allow *her* into a contagious sick-room! So she took her departure to discover contagion of another sort.

Her arrival within the fatal gates was the cause of a good deal of tremor to others besides herself. Fan wondered what it meant, and felt the stir of a hundred pains and suspicions. And even Bristol, the dispassionate guardian, began to think that it was indeed peculiar to see Paul's sister settled in the house. He was somehow not prepared to let his old father know of it. He had never said so to Jessie, but she seemed to understand his intention and to share it—so that during the first day or two she did a good deal of troublesome dodging in the lobbies. Luckily Mr. Bristol was blind, and there is always a chance for nimble people at blind-man's bluff.

She arrived in a tremor of expectation and modesty, and even sweet alarm. And it did her no good when she seemed to discover that Bristol was less impassive than before. He tried to laugh himself out of it, and snigger over it as a piece of extraordinary foolishness in a man like him. He explained it to himself as the result of his first real

intercourse with any woman. It was the first time a woman had been in his house. Hence a little sense of awkwardness and slight embarrassment even in so solid a nature as his own. Of course he knew Fan intimately, but she was almost like a sister. Here it was different. For all he knew, something fatal might be in the air.

Yet if any one had forbidden Jessie to go she would have flared up, and when Paul told her to stay with the excellent Dr. Muster, who was "a sight better" guardian than the one fallen to his own share, she could hardly conceal from him the dulcet wonder that the new arrangement provided for her. If Paul had heard her crying night after night—crying into the deaf night that has had so many such interjectionary confidences from us all, he would surely have admitted the inevitableness of it. Mrs. Muster's illness, so successfully feigned, for reasons now too well known, by means of a few of her husband's drugs, was the most heavenly thing that had ever happened. It let Jessie nearer Bristol. It was surely better for her, since he was so peculiar, that for once love was going to turn microscopic. It was not merely her excitement that drew her there. She felt the humiliation of the excitement, and might even try to get out of it some day. But her better and more cautious judgment threw its vote into the same fatal urn. For in moments of reflection she said to herself, "I will be able to see what the danger is, oh, the sweet man, if

there is any danger, pshaw! at all." So that even her scrupulousness, what there was of it, sent her thither where the traps of temptation lay all bare even.

During the first week or two the necessary formalities were well kept. Bristol made proposals about a new home for his wards, and invited suggestions, while Jessie alluded to their abuse of his hospitality. "Not at all, not at all," he said; "Dr. Muster has been kinder. But you would be really better by yourselves." Somehow the suggestions never took shape. Paul pressed his sister to bring the matter to a point, but the days passed. It might be really better to wait till autumn, Bristol said, and after some delicate, soft denials Jessie agreed. They began to live the quietest garden life. The apples were already ripening in that wonderful sun. But it did seem strange that blind old Bristol was not yet aware of Jessie's permanent residence in his own house. Of course, he heard her voice many a time, and she dined in his company, but it was all easily explained on account of her presumably frequent visits to her brother. Mr. Bristol had objected even to Paul's stay, but a blind man is hardly master in his own house.

It was understood in Great Pines that Jessie was waiting for Mrs. Muster's recovery. Only Bristol knew that Mrs. Muster had never been ill. But he was not sorry for the opportunity of watching the growth of Jessie's feeling. He seemed to have be-

come as impassive as before. It was not possible to question his disinterestedness. Paul was making progress, and Great Pines still looked on approvingly. Bristol spent hours in hard study, which he invited Jessie to share. She came; but she felt infinitesimal before him. She feared his knowledge. Her quickening love for him felt the jealousy and oppression of it. He was full of knowledge, and in a few moments seemed to be able to gather a hundred centuries' pageants about his feet. Whatever in the world could she be to a man like that? Did he need her, she asked herself. She had always to be on the alert for his *mots*, and they began to weary her. History, he once said to her, is like nothing so much as a most glittering procession on a most rainy day. You have no interest in history? Oh yes, yes, she had. Interest in history! Let the dead bury their dead, her love kept calling to him.

And yet, under the cloak of his indifference, she seemed to detect a thing or two. The great head bent over the books was not always full of the books. It was with a sense of surprise that he was admitting to himself that in some way she had drawn his admiration. That meant already much, because admiration was precisely what he was most sparing of. He hated to admire. He said the condition of a lover is lamentably subordinate and out of dignity. Getting on your knees—pah! He never got on his knees. He was already scornful

of the slight perturbation he was discovering in himself; and in his attempt to bring himself out of it he rejoiced that Fan was so near because she would become a foil for Jessie. He felt it to be extremely foolish that he might one day have to play the one off against the other. But if things came to their worst he would take refuge from Jessie by turning to Fan, and from Fan by turning to Jessie, till the episode was exhausted and he could return to his tranquillity. What the devil it was all about he did not yet know. But there is no way, he said, to meet one desire except by another, and then you get quit of them both. Inwardly he resented this alteration of his own personality. Women? He never wanted them. And yet—and yet, he said, there is such a number of four-footed creatures springing about in the backwoods of a man's consciousness!

Little did he know, of course, with all his knowledge, that it was an impossible game he was going to play. And the time was not far off when he became like a tennis-ball whisked about by two skilful bats in female hands. Even already, he, who never was going to give confidences to any one, had half apologetically said to Fan that Jessie Ring's stay was to be very temporary at The Rookery. He took, moreover, precautions of an important sort. For instance, on the advice of a dutiful son, old Bristol was constrained to remain in bed. Papa is really getting too feeble, you know, and ought to

take care of himself at that age! Such an indomitable papa! So that indomitable papa at length gave in—what could he do? he was blind—and lies docile in bed while things are rising to a pitching height downstairs. There is such a velocity in instinct. Before we really know where we are, we are already past all the first milestones on the wild highway of indecency.

They saw little of Fan in those days. The truth was Fan was heart-broken, shut in her room. Now and again she used to peer through the shrubberies to see what might be passing on the lawn of The Rookery. But Jessie was seldom on the lawn, and Bristol was hardly seen. The first time they had met, that May night in the garden, the two women had told each other even without use of words what hate was already sown between them. And Fanny, when she saw Jessie's arrival, now lost all hope, and refused the consolations of Mother Rachel. It was all over for her. It had been a cruel delusion. She ought to have seen long ago that he had outgrown his love for her. She said she would leave her father's house. How could she remain when she knew what was going on, what must inevitably be going on over the wall? Her surprise, therefore, was great when Bristol became more tender and persuasive. He invited her almost pressingly to visit The Rookery. It is quite wonderful, he was saying to himself, that simple Fan has become in some way indispensable to me! She came filled with

agitation. Yet she prepared herself for the struggle with a savage, anticipative delight. She did not feel the degradation of it . . . yet. She felt only the power of her enemy. Her very simplicity, however, helped her to score victories, and she became conscious of her own importance. Jessie and she could agree on nothing, even in the small-talk of their interviews. Almost every word was a jag. It was certainly a strange duel, with an umpire singular indeed, and where the wounds carried more pain than wounds of gun-shot. They were, all three, letting the gorgeous summer pass by without rejoicing in it. Landscape—it was nothing to them. Their eyes were fixed, each knew it, and most of all Bristol, on the weird flora and fauna of our human sin.

“You never come to see *me*, Miss Ring,” said Fan once; “I’m sure we’re near enough.”

“It’s perhaps because you’re just too near,” said Jessie, with a double meaning which Fan had become acute enough to seize; “and besides, you’ve a good deal of dead wall to keep us out!”

“Oh, you can climb it!” said Bristol, answering for Fan. “Come, let’s try—here are steps. D’you remember, Fan, when we used to run along them?”

“Come on,” said Fan, getting arch, and looking towards Jessie.

“No, thank you,” said she, with half-veiled contempt for their childishness.

But Bristol was ready, and helped Fan to mount.

Jessie looked on, and hugged her jealousy. When they were on the top he took Fan's hand to keep her safe, and smiled down on Jessie.

"Come up, Miss Ring," said Fan, prettily.

But Miss Ring refused, and looked almost more childish than the overgrown boy and girl. Fanny had scored. She and Bristol let themselves down by the ladder on the other side into Fan's own garden. They tumbled together on the soft grasses. He was turning playful, an extraordinary thing for him. Jessie could hear them laughing among the bushes. A glimmer of suspicion ran through her. Such scenes had already occurred once or twice. But he varied the play in such a manner that he did not lose his self-respect before them. That was his skill. This folly will be soon over, he said to himself. My record with women is going to be extremely innocent, even naïve. As for the girls, he was killing them with excitement. You talk about *their* self-respect, as if for each of them her self-respect was not one with her triumph. Self-respect—pooh! Our goal, that is self-respect.

If Jessie's danger was double Fanny's, so was her advantage. To begin with she was on the right side of the wall. She saw Bristol in many a mood in which Fanny never saw him. And she kept her secret well hidden from her brother. She said she would wait. She was thankful that she could keep herself so cool—at least outside her own room. It had been, indeed, love at first glance, but one fever-

ish glance was to follow another until the great day came. She knew that at base he must be simply human. The diabolic in him, it might be god-like rather. There is a witchcraft about great minds, as if they are in league and pact with unseen forces. Great men don't glitter, they glimmer. And it was precisely the alluring half-light in which Bristol always moved. She was already within the shadow of his strange, psychic life.

But did she know that the two bedroom windows were still where they had always been? Did she know that the child-love once sworn at the trellis there might reappear late to seek and save them both? Well, it was precisely there that he began to hold talk with Fan again, and even to throw over kisses, and honeysuckle, too, as he used to long ago; and she, the jasmine, piquant like her own mouth. Changed indeed, those two faces at the windows, his now too full of wit, and hers of sorrow. But Fan began to whisper to her father, and the old man rejoiced in secret over such a son. The great walls would be knocked down, and The Elms and The Rookery would be united. That was his dream. As for Mother Rachel, she was in the deliriums known to prophets when prophecies come right.

"I'se said it to yoo, has I not, since ever I did dandle yoo? And we'll begin yoor jackets and trussy (trousseau) to-morrow."

So far as Bristol was concerned it was a perpetual shift, yet it was good, was it not, to win such power

over the destinies of others? To conjure a little with the two girls would mean perhaps small harm to all three in the end. He would get easily out of it, and he began to think the quicker the better. Any calamity might be sitting in wait for a man like him. And it was with amazement that one day he had to shut his book because it was becoming meaningless to him. What is this? what is this? he was saying as he went into the garden to look for Jessie. Am I also full of sensation? He let the dead bury their dead that day. He was in the garden, flushed and radiant. He was seldom flushed or radiant. He sought her on the lawn, but she was in the bower, dressed in her yellow gown, and picking clematis.

"This," she said, rising, while he was already within earshot, "is his starry coming."

And he heard it. And the pomp of June on the lawn seemed dim to that pomp of her love and of her speech of it. . . .

Eh, he said, as he closed the door of his little cabinet that night when the coolness came—such strange vermin course, much like water-rats, through the veins and pipage of men's lives! . . .

CHAPTER II

ASKS PITY FOR THE DOOMED LOVERS

BRISTOL was unable to draw confidences from every one. For instance, he never could from Paul. He had a secret displeasure in the boy's nature, which was full of manly fire. In a hundred ways Paul was showing himself anything but a docile ward. On the arrival of Jessie he had behaved with peculiar insolence both to her and to Bristol. It looked as if he meant to shame his sister out of her boldness. He even invaded that bower where the clematis grew, and thrust himself for ever importunately on their company. Jessie was indignant because "such an infant and chit" had said *he* felt responsible for her safety! But Paul began to suspect that his strange guardian, who was, indeed, more master than guardian, knew his own secret. Why Paul didn't make a clean breast of it, I never understood. He and Maud Whipper had plighted their love to each other, and there's the whole of it. Perhaps he feared Bristol, and with the peculiar sensitiveness of young love shrank from the consciousness of the slightest opposition. Besides, there

is many a man for whom you may have a full contempt, and yet you find yourself speechless before him. That was the effect Bristol had on Paul, so that the boy's attempted challenge had a poor chance.

On his own side, Bristol had kept close watch. He had supplemented Miss Pilking's news by information at first hand. For one afternoon Master Paul became very restive during French lesson, and pulled out his watch more than once. It was enough, of course, to make Bristol prolong the lesson beyond the ordinary time. Paul grew more restless, and the watch came out as often as the watch of a boy who has got one for the first time. Bristol went on with the conjugations.

"Got an *engagement*?" with special emphasis on that word.

"How the deuce d'you know?" was at Paul's lips. But he had time to draw it back, and gave a mere fib for a reply.

"You always look as if you had," remarked Bristol, dryly. "Let us go on. The present indicative of *aimer*. You know the meaning of an elementary, easy verb like that."

"*To love*," replied Paul, as yet blind to the manœuvre.

But it began to dawn on him when Bristol tortured him through the whole verb. Before he was done with it he bore marks of his excitement. Bristol sat impassive, pulling a flower to pieces, and

apparently watching the clouds. Paul was being made like a schoolboy to go through subjunctives and imperatives, that for once had become very full of meaning.

"*If I may love,*" reiterated Bristol, with a flash, while Paul wondered if there was any special meaning in it all, and proceeded to give the French equivalent.

"*If I may not love,*" the torturer continued, until Paul was alive with presentiments and suspicions.

But Bristol had seen enough, and was unwilling to break the "engagement" provided he could himself be a spectator of it. He dismissed the boy at last, and Paul flattered himself that it had all been imagination on his own part. As he went along the duck-pond, and took the path to the uplands, he forgot the incident. There was to be no meeting at Little Pines that afternoon, because Miss Pilking was on the watch there. Maud was coming to meet him again among the trees and dense brushwood above The Rookery. Who knows why they were so bashful? I suppose love knows. In the first blushes of their great devotion they wished to hide their faces yet a little from the violent world.

At any rate, Miss Pilking was doing her best to frustrate her niece's marriage, which would mean so much loss to herself. It was not because she lived very extravagantly with the money her sister had bequeathed her, and which she had criminally secured before the proper time, that she would feel

the want of it serious once it was taken away. She used these funds miserly, and Maud was brought up on the poorest fare. She had not even a room to herself, and was compelled to sleep with her aunt. It was perhaps the most wretched household in Little Pines, although its inmates were only two. But two suffice to make a starting-point for any amount of human tragedy. Aunt Pilking was of such a crotchety nature, so impossible to love. There was no pleasing her, and Maud longed to escape. She had often asked for a separate room, because she could scarcely bear to sleep with the disagreeable little woman. But Miss Pilking said they couldn't afford a double set of sheets. Maud had been with her fifteen years, and knew nothing of her own affairs, who her real guardians were, or what they might be keeping in trust for her. Aunt Pilking still treated her as an infant, and said she would know everything in time. "The world," said Mrs. Crippen, with special reference to Miss Pilking, "is quite full of devils!" "Marriage!" teased Miss Pilking. "What right has a chit to think o' such things?" And the bed used to shake with her laugh. Maud dreaded the night. It was worse than nightmare. It was then that her aunt became too insupportable. She used to engage in nocturnal devotions which invariably preceded her entrance into bed, but as soon as she lay in bed she used to bandy words with Maud which suggested devotional exercises carried on with the devil,

rather. And if, as often happened, Maud had been away all afternoon where the old woman could not follow her because of rheumatism, the disagreeableness of the night was sure to dispel the joy of that glad meeting with Paul. "Will ye make me drive my donkey bus up the cliffs, ye wicked hussy?" demanded Aunt Pilking. But Maud hid it all from Paul. Of the three women—Fanny, Jessie, and Maud—Maud is most womanly. The other two have meantime passed out of their true selves. Bristol is making life terrible and full of unrest for each of them. But Maud, with placid eyes, mouth sinuous and humid, had her fire too, of course, but it was a love refined and assured of Paul.

"You're a shameless gipsy, I'm sure," said her aunt, turning round on her and laying her face on the girl's, so that Maud could see, even in the grey twilight of a summer night at eleven o'clock, the worn, dead pebbles of the old woman's eyes, "and I'll get law on ye." And then she drew the clothes to her own side of the bed, and left Maud shivering.

"I'm not a shameless gipsy at all, Aunt Pilking. What do you mean?" cried Maud, in tears; "and Mr. Ring wouldn't stand it if I told him."

"Eh, eh!" cried Aunt Pilking, turning round again to pinch Maud, and shaking the rickety bed with her own rickety laughter. "We'll see! Such a rheumatism this'll be, ye selfish vixen!"

Then she wound the clothes still closer about herself, and snored till morning, unless disturbed

by wicked dreams. Maud lay not, indeed, wholly miserable, for she knew Paul would deliver her at last. To avoid her aunt, she asked Paul to let them meet in the uplands of Great Pines, rather. It was too horrible to have their kisses disturbed, as they once had been near the lake shore, by that rickety laugh.

Dr. Muster had thus been right. The young lovers did meet on the uplands. Paul was already mounted where Maud was waiting that afternoon, and Bristol was coming leisurely behind. There was enough brushwood, there were plenty of trees and much long grass up there to lie concealed among, and a skilful man might get himself in unobserved. Mrs. Crippen pointed out the very spot where Paul and Maud used to stand, and not far off we saw the long grass among the brushwood still flattened with the shape of Bristol's body. If the doomed boy and girl had known, they would have babbled softer? or Paul would have fought him on the spot? There's no saying. Meantime, in the soft afternoon sun, O darling! "Dust of the wings of Psyche," both of them. Like his sister she was an orphan, and that helped to draw closer the great bands. He felt so twice himself, because she depended on *him*. But if they had known the fate that was even already overhanging, would they have run to the rocks and holes of the mountains? In two years she was to be free, for then she would be full age.

"And then we shall be free!" they said to each other.

He gave her the last roses of June, taken from Bristol's favourite bush.

"Nobody knows we meet here. My aunt doesn't, at least. Does Mr. Bristol?"

"No; and what although, *he's* not my master."

Bristol was thinking that if they stumbled upon him, not *he* but they would feel the awkwardness surely. He heard all they said. Young love, he was thinking, talks sometimes extremely loudly as well as foolishly.

"Oh, Maud, two whole *years!*" exclaimed Paul, as if in corroboration.

It was a gorgeous afternoon, and the sunshine was almost liquid on the leaves. Loch Ludd was visible through the trees in the blue distance, and the Ludd hills covered with a mauve haze.

"Does your sister know?" asked Maud.

"My sister! I think I know what's up with *her*, and for that matter what's up with him. The sooner Mrs. Muster gets better, the better."

Now, look you, Bristol was saying to himself, the selfishness of this cub——

"Oh," cried Maud, "all the better if it should be."

"I don't know," said Paul, darkening, "I wish it weren't. I hate him; and my sister's half afraid of him, I'm sure, though she's so gone on him."

He hates me! said Bristol.

“But he’s kind to *you*?”

“I don’t trust him — oh, stop about *them*, Maudy.”

Kiss upon loud kiss, with spy not far off.

“Darling!”

They went laughing over the rough-and-tumble upland, and spy went down enlightened on many a thing. It was time to silence this Paul. The undiscovered eavesdropping had supplied an amount of information least expected. It was not once or twice that he lay up there listening to the unwary lovers, but it was more on account of what they said about himself than of what they said to each other. And Bristol felt peculiarly incensed against a strippling who had the distinction of being the first to make him perturbed and anxious about his own reputation. His manœuvres with the two fatal women below were actually in the wind? At anyrate, he had once heard Paul tell Maud that Jessie had a rival in Fanny.

Now he had vowed long ago that personally he would know nothing of women, and he had kept his vow. No man could have lived a purer life. His passion had passed long ago into the intensity of his ideas. Marriage, he said, is at best an episode. There are really extremely few human beings with whom I could live long, and the *one* is almost never found. I shall steer clear of these entanglements. But he had not steered clear. No, no, he said in the fulness of his increasing agitation. She is nothing

to me. Nothing, nothing, he repeated, and tried to believe it. And then he used to pass to Fanny to make himself see that the one was as much to him as the other, and that he was really in a state of indifference and equanimity. Yet he knew that a vast change had taken place in himself since that day when he stood at Mrs. Badcock's death-bed analysing dispassionately Jessie's own love for him. I see, he said, we are all inflammable at one point. Nature is awful and will not leave us alone. She sends mankind into the world naked of many a quality, but always provides the lowest of all. Here is an awakening, he said. And judge his wonder when he discovered that Paul's babbling increased his own excitement. I am pure intellect—oh, indeed, am I? he asked with a strange, perturbed laugh. I am nothing of the sort, and no man is. Love's Pan pipes on the uplands, the simple piping of a lad to a maid, had become full of personal wonder and charm. He was himself playing the same tunes down below. She had said, "Starry coming." But had she really even seen love's wild, tremendous zodiac full of portents and signs? The truth was, he had never seen it himself. He was becoming restless—he, the impassive. Full of new currents. The mere consciousness of Paul's opposition added danger to the thickening struggle. But he said he would deliver himself out of it, and the boy too. The ridiculous boy was actually teaching him a double lesson. He honestly thought that in inter-

fering with Paul's courtship he was looking to his future good. Besides, he might be preventing no end of scandal. Two young people on the uplands every afternoon. . . . S-sh! . . . As for the two slightly older people down in the lowlands every afternoon—well, they are older and can take care of themselves.

Meantime, as befitted a dutiful guardian, it became necessary to consult Miss Pilking again. And then he remembered that his true vocation lay in the study of human crime. He was a refined psychic detective. He said he was an entomologist watching the buzzing swarm of our insect hopes and fears. He was anxious to see what instincts of self-preservation Miss Pilking might display once he began to threaten her with disclosure. It was necessary to put both her and Dr. Muster on the inquisitorial rack. Great Pines, apparently the most innocent place in the world, was really a hornet's nest, as he had said.

He was sitting at his little cabinet one morning, and was examining against the light the curious bottle Miss Pilking had left with him. Perhaps, he was thinking, she is merely mad after all. This may be hair-wash, which, as is usual with hair-wash, did not prevent Maria's hair coming out, and foolish old Pilking may be thinking herself guilty for nothing. He was disturbed by a sound in the avenue. He looked out, and saw Miss Pilking driving up in her donkey-cart. She looked like a toy

witch set in a go-cart to frighten children. She stopped before the door, and got out. Then she raised her stick to warn the donkey on its behaviour while she was indoors. "You, you! Move, sir, if you dare!" And the donkey turned its head and gave an ear-shattering bray, as if indignant at the doubts she was casting on his record of good conduct. Bristol waited till she came in. Of course she had come to rail on Maud and Paul, and to ask Bristol to interfere.

"I will, Miss Pilking," he said.

She shook her stick as she used to. Bristol felt a certain revulsion at her unpleasantness. Why should he spoil himself in such vulgar detective work? There is an acuteness really discreditable; and an adept who knows all the poor tricks in men's brains, and can work them like snaps and patent locks, may be a poor creature after all. But he let Miss Pilking go on. It had become too much a habit with him.

"Eh," she said, with a stamp of her old, square foot, "is an old rheumatic going to stiffen for a chit like *that*, because she thinks a boy's wantin' to sleep with her? We old ones won't be shovelled out!"

"Take—take care, Miss Pilking," said Bristol, examining her very closely.

She was indeed like an old sorceress. She wore her white summer cloak with sparse silk fringe, which displayed worse than ever the bend in her back.

"I was never for marrin' myself," she continued; "but she's just her mother over again, who played tricks and left *me* out. Eh! I remember, I remember."

"Does Mr. Ring visit often?" asked Bristol.

"Often! It's the talk o' the place. The girl can't sleep at night for thinking o' him, and clutching o' him in her glimmering dreams. *I* get no sleep! At twelve o'clock at night, at twelve o'clock at night. She needs something to quieten her, *she* does!"

She cast her eye on the bottle which was resting near Bristol's hand, and she gave a cry as if she had suddenly remembered it. She limped towards it, and he let her take it. I shall have recourse to the police sergeant after all, he was thinking. For at that moment he heard Jessie singing in the orchard, and he was becoming impatient with Miss Pilking. She almost spilled the bottle as she picked it up and tucked it under her cloak.

"Miss Pilking!" said Bristol. "Is it hair wash?"

"I've another to mix. An old wife gave it me. 'Tis a wash for love-sick maids," she went on, as if she were doing his bidding, "and helps them out of it. She's a handsome lass, dark like the mother, and can afford to lose some o' her good looks."

She was stalking with help of her stick about the room, and Bristol lost a good deal of what she said. He was half-listening to the song in the orchard—

My love, I hear him
Reaping the ripe barley,
Poppy heads near him!

But it was disturbed by Miss Pilking's croak. When she came to the window again, he thought he saw in her eyes the arrival of the glitter of crime. He let her go on. It was like crime thinking aloud. Now and again he interrupted her with a "Miss Pilking!" emphatically pronounced. She sometimes pulled herself up as if startled at the fact that she had an audience. Crime was thinking aloud, but so was love in the orchard, and he kept listening to the voice—

Drowsy poppies, fear him!

He knew that sensation was killing out in him thought and duty and everything. But he attempted to listen to Miss Pilking. "Hair out, teeth . . ." he remembered the description of the end of Maria.

"Bear ye one another's burdens"; of course, but it is as well that they should get accumulated. You will then have more merit in bearing them. He had once said to Lord Sother, "I would suggest vice in small doses; homœopathic vice, my good lord." But was it for him to manufacture antidotes to moral poisons? Look you, he said, vice and virtue they are like two popular chemists pitting against each other with opposition pills. I find our bodies splarged over with their advertisements. We, the public, are said to benefit by competition.

Miss Pilking was evidently no homœopathist in iniquity. That was her own look out. As for Maud and Paul, he, in company with the common sergeant, would take care of them, if there were need.

"Go, go, Miss Pilking," he said, impatiently. "You are extremely ridiculous."

"I tell you," she said, pointing at her head with her stick, "it's just twelve o'clock at night here."

"Well, at anyrate," said Bristol, laughing, and pointing to the clock, "it's just twelve o'clock in the day here, and I think Miss Ring is going to have lunch."

"Your pardon I would beg," said Miss Pilking, as she curtsied and limped out, "and a good-day to you."

Bristol watched her drive down the avenue, administering liberally to her donkey the rod of correction. He went hastily to the orchard, where he met Jessie coming out laden with gay gear of summer. He forgot the common sergeant that day. And the police of his own wisdom and sanity was likewise marvellously asleep. He listened to her in their bower again.

My love, I hear him.

"Yes, yes," he said, "quite extraordinary," keeping time all the while.

Death, they say, is a mower,
Ay, and Love too,
And seed comes back to the sower.

She stopped, with her eyes liquid on him, and then went on with the voice of the siren—

And the blush of the rose to the grower.

“And the dart to the thrower,” he said, heaving perhaps the first sigh he had ever heaved. “Who made it?” he asked. “It is pretty.”

“Oh, I did,” she said.

He took refuge in his study again, and tried to turn the spray of cold knowledge on that heat.

“My God!” he said, “this pain is like a piston!”

But he saved himself that day. A will like his took long to break. And at least, in the midst of these lyrical episodes, he kept an eye on Paul. It was the last fluttering and mistaken sense of his duty. He had not yet troubled Miss Pilking with the common sergeant. She is perfectly mad, he said, and there is nothing in it. Besides, his interest in crime had become curiously jaded and chilled. He was so full of a new sort of interest. Yet he took time to remonstrate with Paul on the foolishness of marriage. Paul himself had been long suspecting that the day of encounter could not be far off. But he wished to conciliate Bristol. He saw all the manœuvres that were going on under his eyes, but gave no sign. Let them have their fling, he said. I’m having mine. In spite of such tolerance, however, he noticed that Bristol was becoming more irritable during French lesson. No matter how painstaking the heart-breaking verbs were pre-

pared, he seemed bent on fault-finding. Paul was proud and handsome, and sometimes ventured to stare his adversary out. But he could hardly withstand that steady gaze. Bristol was massively built, and took care of his body. He ate, it is true, like an ascetic, but he was ascetic only about the face. Paul was far behind him in every sort of sport. Even Black Harry stood in awe of "them jint and limbs o' his." In fact, it was Bristol's physical strength that had at first drawn Paul's admiration. Bathing had begun two months ago, and it seemed an easy thing for Bristol to swim across Loch Ludd. In fresh water, thought Paul, a great feat. These were Paul's first lessons in swimming. Bristol and he used to ride from Great Pines, and leave their horses by the lake margin while they bathed. Paul was surprised to be pitched headlong from the boat to find his way as best he might to the surface again. It was during one of those bathes that the encounter took place. Bristol had observed that sometimes after the bathe Paul had an errand at Little Pines, which lay two miles further up.

"Going to Little Pines?" he asked.

Paul said yes.

"What for?"

"Oh, I want bacchy," said Paul, drying himself.

"You mean you want Maud Whipper?"

Bristol knew when to be direct and when to conceal his hand.

Paul started. The blush that coloured his face,

which was already highly coloured after the bathe, ran over his body down to the soles of his feet. There was no denying it.

"Oh, perhaps I should have told you, but——"

"I think you should, *and*," said the guardian with mocking emphasis, "I forbid you to go there again."

"Indeed, and I will," said Paul, in a blaze of astonishment.

"Indeed, and you won't."

"What have *you* to do with it, I would like to know? Cu-rse you!"

Bristol was upon him in a moment with his riding-whip. And when a man like him has a whip he is sure to overdo the thing. He laid about the boy's naked body till it was scarlet with stripes, and the boy was screaming with rage and pain. The tears were hot in his eyes.

"You'll remember again, I think, *this* Whipper!"

"Yes, I'll remember again," blubbered Paul in sobs that were hardly a disgrace to him. "I . . . I would like to know what this is for, you damned beast and bully? I'll go to Dr. Muster, I will! You damned brute and coward, that you are! And you'll not dare to marry *my* sister!"

It was all so like a boy.

"Yes, go to Dr. Muster, do," said Bristol, with a strange laugh which Paul could not have understood, and a start which made him double up.

He put on his clothes hastily, first running with them to some distance from Bristol. He left his horse, which was one of Bristol's, for Bristol to look after. Bristol called him back, but he fled. He did not go to Maud Whipper, but took the small paths back to Great Pines, and made straight for Dr. Muster's.

CHAPTER III

GOES ABEGGING FOR ADVICE

PAUL was sure that Dr. Muster would take his side. He even had an affection for Dr. Muster, for he had discovered with a boy's sure insight which of his guardians was lovable. It was certainly not Bristol. It was the old doctor with benevolent eyes. And of course Paul would have ridiculed the idea that Dr. Muster had once slightly tinged his fingers in crime. There is no other word for it, I am afraid, said Bristol. Only slightly tinged, I know, and an excellent man, a most useful man. What has he not done for Great Pines? He has half expiated himself long ago by these unpaid visitations to the poor. Far better that Busk was allowed to die. Great Pines has been infinitely the gainer. Such irony of moral economics! These adjustments and silent processes of revenge that take place apart from any one's notice or bidding move my admiration in this world. I will watch Dr. Muster.

Paul, of course, had not read Dr. Muster's history so deeply. He was going to ask for the room Jessie had vacated. He was going to say that he

would be no inconvenience, and that he would be as quiet as a mouse as long as Mrs. Muster remained ill. In any case he refused to return to The Rookery, and he meant to work for his Army Examination as best he could without Bristol's help. Maud would approve of it all when she knew. As for Jessie, she could settle at The Rookery for ever if it pleased her. As for himself, he would marry on his prospects, although he was as yet ignorant whether they were good or bad. He was even pleased as he went hurrying along that there was at last a breach between himself and Bristol. At the worst, Bristol could not keep money from him. He was not a schoolboy any more, and he had endured bullying long enough. Only some four months had elapsed since his grandmother's death, and they had been the most miserable of his life. He had even lost spirit, and it seemed time to rebel.

But of course Dr. Muster can give no help at all, and dare not interfere with any decision Mr. Bristol chooses to make. Dr. Muster is rather in need of help himself! The last few days have been full of surprises for the Muster household. For instance, although, as we hear, Mrs. Muster lies ill in bed, she is really packing furniture for removal to a more modest lodging. This has become needful because Bristol decided a few weeks ago to curtail her husband's income by about a half. It was one way of discovering the reality of the doctor's retri-

bution. Bristol had no intention to appropriate the money.

"I am keeping it all for you," he said to the discomfited man as he showed him the statement of receipts. "I have banked it at Brind's."

"Not in my name? O God!" cried Dr. Muster. "Take it all."

"No, no," said Bristol.

"Really, I beseech you," exclaimed the poor doctor. "I have done nothing wrong—nothing. Busk never could have got better. I gave him everything he needed. What I did wrong was that I wickedly rejoiced that my skill could not help him, because then I might marry his wife. Yes, I admit wickedly rejoiced, and waited with impatience, but that was all. I gave him nothing that I should not have given him, and I withheld from him nothing that he required."

"All right," said Bristol, pushing in the papers.

So that Dr. Muster had to remain obedient and accept any orders that came from The Rookery. At any moment it might be made known in Great Pines that he had no blameless record, that he had at least "wickedly rejoiced." His sparse hair was getting bleached by anxiety, and Great Pines was already talking about his increasing nervousness. And his wife lying ill, respected woman! Great Pines did not know what was going on, and even Mrs. Crippen was asleep. It was never even whispered that Dr. Muster had been at The Rookery

with his account books and had come back a poorer man by about a half. A secret is an itchy thing.

"You can get into a smaller house, you know," said Bristol, unperturbed.

The tottering man fought hard to retain his house, but at length yielded.

"Very . . . very well, if you say so," he replied, shaking in every limb. "But my poor wife."

"Ah, Widow Busk?" said Bristol. "She's not really ill?"

"No," said Dr. Muster.

"You see," Bristol continued, "the people have stopped talking about Miss Ring's arrival here, so you need not be frightened, though I assure you I——" He did not give Dr. Muster the satisfaction of hearing the rest. The old doctor was chattering about the teeth, and had not ventured to sit down.

"Sit down," said Bristol.

"Thank you," said Dr. Muster.

But he had really nothing to say, and he waited like a mendicant on Bristol's pleasure. Even an exclamatory gasp would have been out of place. He was in a daze. Bristol used to let him sit half an hour without uttering a word to him, while he himself was ranging through his books. "A terrible man!" he was muttering to himself when Bristol once advanced to where he was sitting. Dr. Muster rose like a menial to wait his master's bidding. Bristol looked very steadily into his eyes.

"Good God! what is coming?" thought Dr. Muster.

"These," said Bristol, almost with a touch of comedy in his tone, "may be the very heraldic colours and double coat-of-arms of ancient sin!"

Dr. Muster drew a long breath.

"You can go," said Bristol.

He went, and a hundred projects flitted through his mind, but he could find hope in none of them. He thought of making a public confession of how the matter really stood. The fact was that he had not Busk's death on his conscience. Busk had died under ordinary treatment, although it was true that Dr. Muster had not worked the case "quite so hard" as he ought, and that he had "wickedly rejoiced" in Busk's death. But he shrank from admitting even this much. It would raise suspicions that would never be allowed to rest again, and in any case it would ruin his reputation. His best years were already gone. He did not know the moment Bristol might demand all he could give. If he left Great Pines sudden destruction would doubtless overtake him. Bristol would disclose everything. But if he remained it would be a frightful prospect. He saw before him an indefinite accumulation of toil and horror.

"His eyes," he whispered to Mrs. Muster when he returned that afternoon, "were like mouths!"

It was all inexplicable at Great Pines. When Dr. Muster's gathering misfortunes were mentioned to Bristol he looked surprised, and inquired the cause. He proposed that if things should come to

their worst Great Pines and Little Pines should arrange a public subscription for their beloved physician. He would be willing to subscribe himself. And when things did come to their worst Dr. Muster himself carried the subscription to The Rookery, and Bristol ironically jingled his own donation again along with Lawyer Crack's and Banker Brind's.

"I will keep it all for you," he said, smiling to Dr. Muster and patting him on the back. "You are getting rich. I am turning your penance into pence, the way the Church does, you know."

Paul, to be sure, knew as little as any one else what was taking place. But he was surprised to find Dr. Muster packing up, and his house in a state of confusion. It looked as if he had been shedding tears. Paul at once inquired after Mrs. Muster's health, which was doubtless causing the genuine man great alarm.

"Oh, no, my boy! She . . . she's better, I thank you. I do thank you."

Dr. Muster brushed aside his weakness, and Paul was too delicate to inquire further. Some favourite patient dead, more than likely. So Paul began to unfold his own case.

"I would like to live with *you*. Doctor, take me instead of Jessie," said he, but not without looking round the dismantled room.

"I'm afraid that's not possible, dear boy."

Paul looked confused and disappointed.

"You see, my lad," continued Dr. Muster, while the boy's heart was sinking, "you're very young, and it might be better to wait. All that you've told me I . . . I sympathise with, and I knew part of it before."

Here the doctor tried to break into a smile, and he took Paul's hand.

"It might be better to wait, you know," he repeated. "It's a difficult world at the best, and we all go so easily wrong! Mr. Bristol is doubtless looking to your good, though you may not think so. He wishes you to be careful and take time. A terri—— a most scrupulous man! Maud? Yes, she's a fine girl, and I'm glad for your sake, Paul. But, really, consider the matter well. Love, you know, is *vertige*—ah me! I'm afraid I must agree with Mr. Bristol!"

"But," said Paul, crestfallen and irritated, "I'm free in two years, am I not?"

"Oh, you're free anyway," said Dr. Muster, "but better wait."

"Free anyway!" cried Paul. "Oh, my!"

"Yes," said Dr. Muster, alarmed at his own indiscretion; "but you must not say *I* said it!"

"Oh," cried Paul, in a burst of excitement, "I'll go to Lawyer Crack."

"No, no, my good boy," appealed Dr. Muster.

But Paul ran off without even saying goodbye, and left Dr. Muster muttering, "Another nail in my coffin!"

Paul was not so ignorant as to suppose that Bristol could prevent him marrying. When Maud and he said to each other that they would be free in two years, they meant that they would be free to manage their own affairs. Paul's main anxiety was lest Bristol would withhold money. He went hurrying to Lawyer Crack to discuss whether Dr. Muster was right. Doubtless Bristol would make matters as uncomfortable as possible, but Lawyer Crack would be a match for him. Paul thought of racing back to Little Pines to consult Maud, but he might meet Bristol. It would be better in any case to take some preliminary steps. He would get lodgings near Maud that very night in Little Pines. He decided, like many another boy, to arrange all the future in a few hours.

On his way to Lawyer Crack he passed Lord Sother's, and it suggested itself to him that he should go in and get his lordship on his side. For that matter, he would have all Great Pines about Bristol's ears. Lord Sother used to notice Paul, for he loved a fine youth. He used to stop him on the road, and tell him that he could think of no one like him except his lordship's self in his young days when he used to sow the wind and earthquake in young ladies' hearts.

"And reap the whirlwind, my boy!"

He always met Paul with a smile.

"I don't like shrewd people, lad. Don't be shrewd. It gives the eyes a blackguard, disrepu-

table look. You young fellows are generous and fiery. I love you for it."

Paul laughed.

"Ay, and that laugh of youth! What's wisdom to it? Hey! wisdom's a tooth, is it, that cuts and gnaws, and decays and rots too—there! I'd forgive a man a good deal if 'e can smile and not look damned glums. That's it, like you, my boy. You're a good chap!"

And the old lord used to invite Paul to old port after patting him on the back. Paul did not altogether enjoy his lordship's flattery, but he thought it would be a good thing to tell him his difficulties. He went up to The Lodge, and was met at the door by Janet, who asked him if he was sure it was not her ladyship he wanted. It seemed to matter a great deal.

"For if ye be her la'ship's guest, and I put ye beside his lo'ship there'll be high palavers between lo'ship and la'ship. I'm sarvint to two households though I be in one house. Lo'ship and la'ship won't see each other. Such a worry, sir, double wark and worry! I've to carry lo'ship's victuals to his own chambers and la'ship's to hers. Brother-and-sister-christian-condick, this! Who ever heard of lo'ship and la'ship at separate tables? The washin's heavy—mercy, they might a' thought on *that*! Has ye ever seen la'ship, mister? Oh, she's a portent!"

"I wish to see Lord Sother," said Paul.

"Ay weel, this way," said Janet, after having

thus disburdened herself. "Lo'ship's mornin' ragoo, as they say, 's about served. You're from The Rookeries, gent?"

Paul said yes, as he was ushered in to where his lordship was sitting at his window as if in an expectant attitude. He was waiting to call over a good-day to Mrs. Crippen, and wave a blue handkerchief. Mrs. Crippen admitted that he once—or twice—paid her a visit. Bristol had chaffed her on it, and had dropped a hint or two in Great Pines. It was then that the slanderous reports of which she complained began to be spread abroad. She was invariably reticent as to details, but she confessed the visit.

"But mercy upon us," said she, "was I not astonished!"

It was with extreme difficulty that her friends ever got her to go further.

"He came in," she said one day when she was more communicative, "with such a nice, 'Howd'ye-do, sweet Mrs. Crippen?' and then wanted to . . . to——"

She always stopped here for breath.

"'For shame, my lord,' says I. 'Nay, Mim,' says he, and took me by the . . . oh, by the——!"

We generally waited to see if she would continue, but we waited in vain.

"Aha!" cried his lordship, turning round when Paul entered, "this is such a pleasure!"

It was still early in the day, but my lord's "ra-

gooh " was really an excuse for the presence of various liquids which invariably accompanied it. He always said the world was an open boat, and his gait often enough suggested the high seas. He used to walk as if the floor were rising to meet him like the deck of a pitching ship.

" Hip, boy," he said to Paul, " this old sh-ship's a poor sea-goer. Never takes waves at all. And yet they tell me I'm always getting into po-ort! "

Lord Sother kept Paul's hand in his own, which was very warm and soft. Paul refused to " get into po-ort." His lordship pointed to the window.

" Waiting till she heaves in sight. Wonderful woman, sir. It's about her time. She waves her duster to me. It's better than nothing in this infernal boredom! "

Paul looked shy.

" What! boy," said his lordship, " you're getting too thin. This'll never do. Time enough to get thin in the grave—eh? Lose flesh there by the pound, I'm told—eh? Success of that Die—t guaranteed! "

Paul hoped his lordship was well.

" Peh, peh—yes, I'm well. She's coy, you know, but she'll come," said the old lord with a leer, pointing in the direction of Mrs. Crippen's windows. " Bless me, there she is! "

Mrs. Crippen was vigorously waving her duster in response to the old lord's jubilant salutations.

" There, there," he said, when Mrs. Crippen re-

treated. "That's what I've come to. Fallen into senile innocence and virtue, gout and *ennui*."

He leant on Paul as he hobbled to his seat again.

Paul asked if his lordship had had sport recently.

"Sport! with this gout? I've been hunting the *dear* too long, my boy. Have *you* begun?"

Paul smiled acquiescently, though he didn't understand what the old lord said. He hardly appreciated the jokes, and thought it was no use approaching his lordship in that state. But Lord Sother asked after his guardian.

"How's Bristol? Bless you, he's my guardian too. He makes me bristle."

"Oh," said Paul, "I'm not there now."

"Tah, tah," exclaimed Lord Sother. "What's in the wind?"

"He's not going to lord it over *me*," said Paul, indignantly.

"Quite right, boyie. What's up?"

"I want to get . . . to get married," Paul answered with a blush, "and he won't let me."

"Hey, hunting the *dear*. Thought you said you never did it?"

"I can marry, my lord, can't I?"

"*Can't* you? Who'll keep you? Any callet that presents herself and is presentable. Good luck to her that gets you. What's the sweet girl's name, boyie?"

"Maud Whipper," said Paul, a little embarrassed.

"Ominous name," replied his lordship. "Might as well be Whacker."

Paul began to wonder whether it was wise to give his confidences. But Lord Sother continued to abuse Bristol.

"I don't like him; too shrewd. Lent me money and said it belonged to Somebody Badcock, but it's been poor game to me."

Belonged to Somebody Badcock!

"Got, or rather took, everything," continued his lordship, having either never heard that Paul's grandmother's name was Badcock, or having forgotten—"all the securities I had—he, he! Bless you, how *can* a man get along without the rabbit-killers?"

It was news for Paul, but for the moment he preferred to talk about a subject still dearer to himself.

"Dr. Muster says he has no power over *me*."

"Why, I should think not," replied Lord Sother, after a deep draught. "Go on, my lad, in spite of all the bristles and thistles in this bristly, thistly world. A jaggy place!"

Paul felt the thistly world crumpling like feathers in his hand.

"You'll help me, won't you, my lord?" said he, rising in his eagerness.

"Ah, my darling boy, I'm afraid you'll have to help me against him. The last loan possible! He gave me a bad cock for a hundred rabbits. He goes

about with a *fouling* piece, I assure you." His lordship was stroking Paul's hand. "But cheer up, my lad; I'm with you anyway against the pack o' them."

"Isn't he a blackguard?" said Paul, exultantly.

"They're all blackguards, boyie, without a heart among 'em. Cheer up! I see fortune in your eyes. Warm sheets to you, boyie!" the old lord cried as he opened the door for Paul. But Lady Emma was in the lobby, and my lord backed in again with an "Oh!"

My lord and lady could never pass each other on a stair or in a lobby without some threatening looks. His lordship, indeed, restrained with difficulty his instincts for gallantry, and often used to step aside and bow while his sister swept past. He admitted to some of his friends that she inspired fear. But sometimes he used to turn round and sing out after her in defiance an impromptu drinking-chorus. In spite of all his loans Lady Emma never could get a penny out of him for household purposes, and she decided to live apart in her own rooms, and do her best to pay her own debts. Only once she had broken the silence. She was eager to know if he had heard the latest about Lord Squall and Miss Candy. It was news indeed. Lord Squall had been on a roof all night with Miss Candy. Lady Emma called up to his lordship if he had heard the newest. No, no, his lordship had heard nothing. Lady Emma kept her back turned while

she cried up the stair to his lordship in telegraphic form.

"Squall and Miss Candy on the roof of Candy's house. Young Candy, the brother, locked them out for a joke. They were out *all* night—rain, sleet, and some lightning!"

"Squally, in fact," said his lordship, shaking the stairs with his laugh.

It was seldom, however, that Lady Emma permitted herself any conversation with her notorious brother. But Janet had orders to keep watch on all his visitors and to report on them.

"I say, Baxter, who is it?" she asked, after Paul had been announced.

"La, your la'ship, that 'andsome gent from Rookeries."

"Gent! very likely. Oh, no, it's a woman, simpleton, *dressed* like a gent."

"Oh, la'ship, for shame! I've not been used to such ways."

"Describe her," said her ladyship, impatiently.

"La, then, she's a body like a strappin' lad, but her skin's dainty like a lassie, that's true, and her voice wasn't very deep, that's true. Such morals, your la'ship! I can't stay longer. Mither 'ouldn't have't. I'se not been brought up to the like. I never can look across but that Crippen's wavin' from morning to night. It's a shock to a humble woman, la'ship. That Crippen! Oh, she's a painty!"

Lady Emma agreed that Mrs. Crippen was a painty, but she ordered Janet off, and described her as a green and unprofitable Baxter. She went to the lobbies herself to superintend the exit of the disguised female. As soon as Lord Sother's door was closed she called Paul back.

"Come here, miss!"

Paul turned round.

"Oh, yes, masculine hussy, *I* know you!"

Paul looked astonished, but advanced towards her ladyship. It was only about the third time he had seen her. She was immense, and red in the face, and was panting with asthma. It was only Janet who could brook her frown. Before Paul knew where he was he was taken by the shoulders and hustled into her ladyship's apartments, which were dark.

"You've got your hair in the new fashion too, cropped like a man's."

Paul had heard of the eccentricities of Lord and Lady Sother, and prepared to take things in good humour.

"How long has it been going on?" asked Lady Emma, surveying him with her eyeglass. "Are you not ashamed, woman, to go about in this way?"

Paul looked confused. He had a loose summer overcoat on, which perhaps helped to strengthen suspicion.

"Oh, that's the way they all go on," continued Lady Emma. "You won't cheat me, gipsy."

She came up and felt about Paul's chest. Paul started back.

"Poor starved wretch! Little or nothing here," and she dropped him in contempt.

"Really, Lady Sother," said Paul, "I don't know very well what all this means. You don't know me, and have never seen me perhaps, but I am Paul Ring. I think you know my sister."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Lady Emma, "is it possible? Just excuse an old woman of the world, Mr. Ring. I *did* think . . . Well, I'm an old fool!"

Paul said no, and looked round her ladyship's apartment. But he would not be pressed to stay.

"Not a glass of my good Niersteiner?" for she had, as well as her brother, a taste in wines.

But Adonis would have none of it, and he left Lady Emma mourning over the lost glories of youth.

"Heh!" she said, as she looked at herself in the glass, "my sunny day gone, and I'm just a poor butterfly on the rocks. My hair—look at it! They used to call it a cataract, it was so *numerous*. But now it's only like a cataract because it's falling out, and a cataract's white!"

It was high time, indeed, for Paul to be at Lawyer Crack's office, and he went hurrying there. It was a great stroke of luck to have conversed with Lord Sother. Paul felt instinctively that it must be wrong for a guardian to lend the funds of his

wards, and he was anxious to lay the matter before Lawyer Crack. His repugnance to Bristol had had a sure basis after all, then. His own fortune, besides his sister's, might be already filched away. A spendthrift like Lord Sother would probably never be able to repay a loan. Paul was in a blaze of excitement and indignation. He almost turned to run back and question Dr. Muster. A hundred suspicions crowded through his mind. He decided first to see the lawyer. He would question Dr. Muster later.

Lawyer Crack's office was opposite the Town Hall of Great Pines, in the square where Great Piners used to stroll on a summer evening. The town clock was striking *three*. Lawyer Crack was sure to be at his desk, thought Paul. And, indeed, the old lawyer was sitting solitary at his desk and musing on a rather meagre day's work. He used to say that whatever amount of rabies the dog-days produced elsewhere they never made people more litigious. There was no getting forensic material out of his townsmen. Like a policeman grown weary of a too orderly and respectable district, he would have welcomed the most ordinary street row for a variation. With unexpected penetration Mr. Crack observed the anomalies of his profession, and had once said to Banker Brind that he had a particular fondness for scoundrels.

"Lookee here, Brind, a judge has a pecuniary interest in every criminal. And Mrs. Crack gets

a silk skirt now and again, thanks often to the mad-caps of Great Pines."

"There's some'at in that," said Brind.

Indeed there is; and I have often wondered what on earth would become of your Reverences if that "kingdom" got suddenly "come." I have heard many and terrific denunciations by your Reverences, and you have sometimes made my hair stand on end. But where would you be without such blackguards as myself? Your oratorical reputations, like your palaces, are built on our iniquity, which is, indeed, a universal employer of labour, though the only one whom no Employer's Liability Act seems to touch. And the public propagators of virtue, I mean your Reverences, remind me of nobody so much as Betsy, my housemaid, who throws tea-leaves on my carpet, and then sweeps the dust from one side of the room to the other and then back again. But of all the ineffectual ways of laying the dusts of our iniquity, I know none so lamentable as your temperance tea-meetings. Never so many tea-leaves sprinkled in vain!

I was tempted to make these reflections pass as my own, but I had better admit that they were Lord Sother's. At any rate, Lawyer Crack would have agreed with them in spite of his personal indignation at Bristol. He never could persuade himself that Mrs. Badcock, Paul's grandmother, had ventured to die without consulting himself. He had waited months to see what steps the two guardians

of the Rings intended to take. He had paid visits to Dr. Muster, being the less formidable of the two—visits which purported to be made on behalf of the invalid Mrs. Muster, but which were really made with a view to professional interests. Dr. Muster always told him to go to Mr. Bristol. “A terri . . . a most scrupulous man,” he said. But whether afraid of Bristol’s scrupulousness or terribleness, Mr. Crack never ventured near The Rookery. He kept wondering how long they were going to attempt to stagger on without his help. Meantime, as he had facetiously said to Banker Brind, he had the Rings at his fingers’ ends. He had studied the family’s history and knew Paul’s ancestors for at least a generation and a half. But his efforts to discover who was really managing their affairs had been fruitless. “Deep as Ludd” he had said to Brind. Yet it was impossible that Bristol could know all the knotty points of the law. A day would come when he would yield to superior knowledge. If not, there were quagmires ahead said the old lawyer, and endeavoured to possess his soul in patience.

He was, therefore, not greatly surprised when Paul stepped in, blushing as usual, and saying his good-day.

“At ’e last,” chuckled the lawyer, “I did think it would come. Wait till Brind hears!”

He rose to offer Paul his chair. “Just you be seated, my young sir,” said Crack, with undisguised pleasure at the capture. “Just *be* seated.”

Paul was too excited and preoccupied to observe Lawyer Crack's æsthetic astonishment. Indeed, Lawyer Crack was mildly censuring Providence for not having sent Mrs. Crack a boy like that. "He looks like an heir!"

"Well, my young sir," he said aloud, "it's a sweaty day. Just be seated and cool yourself. How's Miss Ring?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Paul, "and don't care." "Well, I *do* care," he continued, with strange *naïveté* not unnoticed by the old fox, "but I've come about other things."

Crack smiled paternally, while Paul looked embarrassed, as if he had something to confess. But he was encouraged with many a "My young sir." He felt portentously young before Lawyer Crack.

"Ah, I see . . . Mr. Bristol is. I see. . ." said the lawyer.

"Yes," said Paul, thinking that Mr. Crack's penetration was almost alarmingly keen, for as yet nothing had been dropped about Bristol, and it was difficult to discover what there was to be seen.

"I see—some little differences, a few misunderstandings," suggested Crack, with emphasis peculiar to himself.

"Oh, it's just this," answered Paul. "Mr. Bristol says I can't get married, or objects to me getting married, and Dr. Muster says I can. Isn't Dr. Muster right, Mr. Crack? Bristol can't keep money from me?"

"Well," replied the lawyer, adjusting his glasses and clearing his voice, "Dr. Muster is an excellent man, my young sir, and Dr. Muster happens to be right, though it is not likely Dr. Muster would be able to support his statement in the required and prescribed form. Mr. Bristol, my young sir, is an excellent man, and Mr. Bristol happens to be wrong, and evidently knows nothing whatever on the matter. You have done well to come. I thank you, Mr. Ring. Coming to a lawyer or sending for him is like coming to a physician. Some people send when it is already too late, when they are on their death-couch and in their ultimate gasp. You have been wise beyond your years. Your years? I mean your age, my young friend?"

"*Nineteen*," said Paul, a little disgusted with Mr. Crack's pretentiousness, but elated with his conclusions.

"Quite so. You are still a minor, though not a pupil."

Mr. Crack then waved his hand, and pointed to a row of bulky volumes, as if he intended to consult them. But first of all he astonished his young friend by giving a rapid summary of the Badcock genealogical tree.

"Your mother's grandfather (paternal) was a remarkable man. He held property in Ripling which he inherited from his paternal grand-uncle. That descends . . . let me see, let me see——"

"Never heard of it," said Paul.

"Strange!" remarked Mr. Crack in an absent-minded manner as he fingered some sheets. "Mr. Bristol is reserving it as a surprise, doubtless. Most certainly," he continued, after a pause, "there were no heirs portioners. And then the mother of your father's aunt, that is of course his own grandmother, had a considerable estate. Just let me see now . . . let me see."

Paul was bewildered.

"Why didn't I hear all about this?" he asked, excitedly. "It's a damned swindle!"

"Well—ha, ha—my young friend, Mr. Bristol is Mr. Bristol, to be sure. Has his own methods, maybe."

It was time to tell Lawyer Crack that Bristol had been lending their money.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lawyer Crack, with a spring forward. "To Lord Sother! That is strange—remarkable. Was he appointed in *liege poustie*?"

Paul said he knew nothing about *poustie*, but if it meant damned rot he had had enough of it. He was dashed if he would stand it longer. Since his grandmother's death he had been treated like an infant.

"I see," said the lawyer, with increasing satisfaction. "You think Mr. Bristol is treating you as if you were *non multum a furioso*. He is behaving as if you were *facile*."

"I suppose so," said Paul, whose irritation was keeping pace with Mr. Crack's glee.

"All right, Mr. Ring, we shall set this in order for you. I am in doubts whether your grandmother could appoint a tutor at all. The law may change, but at present only a father besides the Crown may appoint guardians. *Tutor-at-law* he is not; *tutor dative* he is not. *Tutor testamentar* in some sense he is, but we can reduce that. Did Mrs. Badcock, your respected grandmother, sir, write *a me vel de me*? Is there a long deed?"

"I don't know," said Paul.

"I see; let us look at 'Direlton's Doubts,' " said Lawyer Crack.

He took down "Direlton's Doubts" and read over some cases resembling Paul's, and added doubts and premonitions of his own. Paul then listened to an exhaustive disquisition on the functions of guardians generally, in the course of which Mr. Bristol, with all his wisdom, was discovered to be very much astray. "Look at the case of Budge *versus* Budge, or even at Tops *versus* Botoms. They were precisely similar," said Lawyer Crack, bringing his hand down full on the desk. In short, all Mr. Bristol's wisdom was rapidly being turned to foolishness. "What is he, sir?" demanded Lawyer Crack, with indignation. "An empirie, a novice, foolhardy indeed to tread in unfamiliar steps. But he might be worse," suggested the roused man at law—"he might be an *impostor*. It did look as if he was aiming at the *patria potestas* even! Is he actually wishing to become my young

friend's heir after the manner of envious fathers? Nay," said the lawyer, winding up with outstretched hands, "the thing has a worse complexion still. It looks like a case of *agnum lupo committere ad devorandum!*"

"Really!" exclaimed Paul, wondering why Lawyer Crack's Latin should be so unfamiliar, and fearing that he would have poor luck in the Army Examination if it was going to be anything like that.

"Yes," continued the old lawyer, shaking his head, "I am afraid he is *lupo*—I mean *lupus*—and you are *agnus*, my young friend."

"I am *agnus!*" said Paul.

"Yes, that is lamb *versus* wolf, you know. He is going to *devour* you!"

Paul thought it was time to cease being *lamb*, and he put his case unreservedly in Mr. Crack's hands.

"I think we can arrange it for you," said the old lawyer, smiling. "I shall first see Dr. Muster."

"Very well," said Paul, not knowing all the calamity that that would bring to Dr. Muster.

"Meantime," said Crack, as he opened the door for Paul, "who is the——"

"Miss Whipper," answered Paul.

"Ah, allow me—allow me to wish you, my young friend, everything wishable. You may depend upon us."

Paul left triumphant, and Crack smiled for at least a fortnight.

"Looker here, Brind," he said, "they've given in at 'e last, but it's not Bristol, it's the young chap. There's some'at in the wind."

He stopped, for it did not seem prudent to go further, not merely for the sake of Brind's *amour propre*, but in obedience to the principle that secrecy is necessary to the success of diplomatic on-goings.

Yet he did not restrain himself. "First comes the law," says he, "and then the banks. They'll be at ye later, Brind. 'Tis the lawyer knows first if there's some'at to bank! Then comes bankin'."

"That's true. But the banker knows if the lawyer himself's got some'at to bank, seems to me—ha, ha! Then comes bankin'," said Brind, with a laugh at Lawyer Crack, whose account used to stand overdrawn.

"Hey!" says Crack, "maybe. Just wait a bit, and keep sleek. The law's a good game-dog that doesn't bark to raise the game and give 'em too long a start. But the dogs, Brind, are wiser than us often. We get on the scent, p'rhaps, and keep the chain o't unbroken, maybe, but some o' us don't turn like the dogs when it begins to cool, but go a-gallop in the wrong direction."

"By Jiv!" said Brind, "that's an observation!"

CHAPTER IV

BLUSHES A GOOD DEAL

THAT night was to be full of surprises, not merely for Maud and Miss Pilking, but for Jessie and Bristol. Paul did not return to The Rookery. Bristol explained what had happened, and at first Jessie laughed. They delayed dinner an hour, but he did not come, and they dined alone. During the first hour or two Bristol was unperturbed, because he thought Paul would not play the truant over-long. But as the afternoon wore into the evening, and the evening into the night, he began to show his annoyance. He went down the avenue to the gate and looked along the roads, he climbed to the uplands and searched the wood, but the scapegrace was nowhere visible. He saw that Jessie was becoming frightened.

"I will go and look for him," she said. "Did you hurt him, Mr. Bristol?"

"No, no. You will remain here. We understand each other, don't we?" he said, smiling.

It was an uncomfortable smile.

"Oh, no," she said—"no. I will go after him. Besides——"

It was delicate, delicate. Great Pines had begun to frown, and perhaps there was cause. It was impossible to remain even a single night if her brother were not there. She said she would go. It was her duty to her grandmother's memory as well. She was older than Paul, and had promised to be good to him. She rose, and took her bonnet and shawl.

"Walk to Little Pines!" exclaimed Bristol. "Never, unless I accompany you. I will not allow it."

His voice was low, and there was already emotion in it.

"I will drive you," he said, persuasively; "we'll go together."

"Where can he be?" she said. "Let him make love to whom he likes. He's a noble boy."

"Very well, very well," he said, "we'll leave him alone."

"Oh, but I ought . . . I ought to go after him. Besides——"

"'Besides?'" he said, repeating her word.

But she blushed and blushed.

Regrettably enough, indomitable papa heard that conversation, because Jessie had been talking too loudly. Far up as he is, and lying docile under the blankets, indomitable papa hears many a thing, and is far from being of no account. Turns unexpectedly out of bed and surprises us downstairs on the shortest notice. Comes down, the indefatigable man, while we are at lunch together, and once

actually secured Miss Ring's skirts as she was attempting to pass nimbly out. The truth is that papa is perfectly aware of all that has been taking place for the last six weeks, and he has grave suspicions that he is being hoodwinked. He questions his son, but in vain. She has come to see her brother, oh, indomitable papa, surely the most natural and sisterly thing in the world. She is seldom with the brother, my son! The old man would not be thus humbugged. So he turned out of bed again and listened attentively at the door while his son was persuading Jessie to remain. He crept noiselessly in behind them where they were standing in the August twilight at the wide window.

"Why—why go? He's a silly boy. He'll come back again. Leave him alone. Remain—we understood each other."

It was getting darker and darker. For a moment or two neither of them spoke, but the old man in the background could hear their breathing.

"I would never get you back," he said, laying an awkward hand on her.

"What would it matter?" she asked, though she knew all that it would matter.

"I . . . I can't. . . . I love you. There!" he said, babbling it.

"Oh . . . Oh, you blackguard!" cried papa out of the darkness, in such a voice as almost made them both dive through the window. "*This* is the truth!"

Jessie shrieked.

"Yes, go, go," cried the old man, fiercely, as he groped his way towards her. "Save yourself! *Who, who* are you? My God, if I could *see!*"

"Get you to bed, father," said Bristol, collecting himself. "Miss Ring has come to ask for her brother, who has been out all day, and that's all."

"That's all!" cried the old man. "Oh, you blackguard and parricide! My God, it is killing me! If I could *see!*" And he stamped his foot in rage that was doubly blind.

There was nothing for it but to carry him vociferating to bed. Jessie heard his shrill cry, "Oh, blackguard and parricide!" intermittent with Bristol's heavy tread up the stair. The voice sounded horrible, like a warning, and she took it, and fled from the fatal house. When Bristol came down she was gone, and he went running from room to room. He questioned the servants, but they had seen nothing of her. He flew to her bedroom, and lost time striking a match. "She has gone to Little Pines," he said, . . . "taken a gig." He ran to the stables, and saddled his horse, and when he came out the air of the August night blew cool on his face. He galloped and galloped. August moon lit up the roads, but not the walls and hedges where she might be crouching. He had galloped four miles, and had seen no gig nor any one on the road.

He passed and repassed at the gallop mile after moonlit mile of the broad road until he and his

horse were sweating in that cool night. He turned again, and made for Great Pines at a canter. He passed The Rookery, lying still in the moonlight, and his horse's hoofs echoed in the rocks behind. It suddenly struck him to go to The Elms, and he hitched his horse at Fanny's gate. Surely The Elms would be the last place Jessie would take refuge in, but he ran in, terrifying Fan, whom he found at her needle. He had forgotten her existence these last weeks. She seemed resigned. She had for all the past that sort of contempt which defeat brings.

"It is his choice," she said, when they brought tidings about Jessie, as if such a choice meant nothing to herself.

She saluted Jessie as if they were friends, but she knew that it was only her self-respect that imposed this outward charity upon her. Yet her politeness was no less touching, although it was so hollow. "Quiet, Mother Rachel," she used to say when Mother Rachel breathed vengeance against the backsliders.

She started at the sound of swift running on the walk, and before she had time to lay down her work he was in the room, with his hair wet about his brows.

"Is she here? is she here?" he cried, looking wildly round the room.

"Who?" asked Fan, knowing well whom.

"Jessie! Jessie!" he repeated, irritatedly, as if she should know.

It was certainly the first time she had seen him hysterical, and it meant for her the destruction of any last fond hope of her delusion.

She could have cried out bitterly, but she repressed herself, and looked at him with a cold smile of charity.

"I have not seen her," she said. "Mr. Jacob, I hope there's nothing wrong."

"Not seen her! Good God!" and he fled out.

He slept little that night. If sleep came, it was the sort of perturbed, contorted sleep that visits an hospital. Better to be dead, he cried in that rising torment, and the wind passing over you. If he tormented others, it will be admitted that he has begun to torment himself. He was not even able to put his humiliation into an epigram. It was only later, in a much cooler hour, that he could say with double cynicism, Desire is the all-leveller. Meantime he could only roll from side to side and hear his father snore. He cursed the old blind man and Paul as being the twin cause of her strange flight. And yet he had to admit to himself that he had become in recent days curiously reserved. It was he who had become active and she passive. He had once asked her portrait, and she had said "Yes," to be sure, but had not asked his in exchange.

"Write something on it."

"What will I write?" she asked. "I never give my photograph."

"But you will give it to me?"

"Will I write '*Grande Exception*'?"

"Yes, yes," he said.

"Why," she replied too swiftly, "should I make '*Grande Exception*' for you?"

He was speechless, he who used to be so full of words. But she took pity on him, and gave him what he asked, and wrote "*Grande Exception*." He was hugging it there in his bed. He lit his candle to look at the irresistible lips.

Bocca amata soave e pur dolente, he called out in purest modern Italian. *Dolente, dolente*, he kept repeating through that weird night. Everything is *dolente*. Would the intolerable night never pass? *Bocca sinuosa, umida ardente*, he went on in mere helplessness. *Ardente, ardente*—everything is *ardente*. And indeed he was already far on in the kindled ways of love, and his own heart was like a brazier. He counted slow hours of the indifferent night, until, maddened, he rose at a bound. He went to the window, where the morning was working gold-fingered at his lattice. He looked in his mirror while the wind blew back his thick hair. His eyes were brilliant in the mirror. *Grande exception*, he said with a touch of scornful humour, as he watched his own features in the old way.

She cannot refuse, he persisted, as he measured himself against his reflection in the glass. I am . . . am beautifully ugly—*bel brutto* as Italians excellently say. And indeed he was soon spurring

to Little Pines to find out if it were true. As he went again at the gallop he was full of reconciliation, and was even prepared to take an affront from Paul; since nothing makes us so meek as our lust.

The truth is, Jessie had gone to Paul to persuade him back. It would have been strange indeed if she had wished to leave The Rookery. But she had been able to mask her real desire, and had displayed a self-control which Bristol might have envied. Besides, she knew that the absence of Paul made everything different. Her delicacy, so long asleep, was suddenly startled, and the meaning of all the past weeks seemed to become visible only now. Those weeks had been like ladders leading her to a giddy height, a ladder of giddy weeks. For the sake of many a thing she required Paul back. Great Pines and Little Pines had long been the prey of the strangest rumours, and it required only an event like this to throw them both into convulsions. Jessie had skilfully driven out of Great Pines by the old road, and had arrived at Paul's new lodgings while Bristol was pursuing her up and down. She had difficulty enough to find Paul. Maud had heard nothing, and was filled with alarm when Jessie came seeking him. She wished to follow Jessie, but Jessie forbade her, and ran out. She asked a few loiterers in the streets if they had seen her brother—he was well enough known—but no one could give her news. At last she went into a tobacco shop where Paul used to buy his pipes, and

asked the old woman if her brother had been there. Yes, yes, he had been there, and was upstairs, where he had taken a lodging for the night. Jessie ran up, and found him in a blaze of excitement and indignation. The truth was, Paul was thinking, not of all the complications of the future, but of his own disgrace in having been flogged by Bristol, and in having shed tears.

It was all Jessie could do even to make him listen. He sat with his hands on his ears. If he spoke at all it was to call her names, and to order her out. It was a miserable garret, half furnished and without a carpet. It was lit by a skylight, and one side of it was useless owing to the sloping roof. Even where the roof met the opposite wall, Paul was tall enough to touch it. Jessie pleaded and he heard, and went up and took him tenderly by the head. She asked him to go back that night with her. It was already late, and it was time they were on the road. He asked her furiously if she wasn't ashamed, and he reminded her of their grandmother.

She said she had nothing to be ashamed of, and the mere fact that she had come so quickly after him should let him see the cruelty of his calumnies. He told her at the top of his voice of Lord Sother's revelations, but she only laughed, and said that Lord Sother was an old drunkard with not two clear ideas in his head.

"*My* affairs are in the hands of Crack," said Paul, triumphantly.

"Silly boy!" said Jessie.

"I'll let you see!" exclaimed Paul. "You know what gran'ma said. He's a thief! That's what he is!"

"What would you have done without him?" asked Jessie.

"Done without him!" cried Paul. "He's ~~had~~ lied me since the beginning, and he's stolen our money. I'll let him see!"

She tried to calm him, but it was no use. They spent all night wrangling, until Paul said he was going to sleep, and ordered her out. He flung himself on the bed, and turned his face to the wall from her. She sat watching him all night. The garret was bright with the moon, and she could have read a book by the light of it.

But she sat with her hands folded and her mind crowded with thoughts.

"Not away yet?" Paul asked indignantly, as he started during the intervals of his sleep.

She sat thinking and thinking. She wondered how she could best win Paul back, and then she wondered if he was not perhaps right. Did she really know Bristol even yet? The night was sleepless for her as well, but at least she had command of herself. She even felt glad that she had become so reserved. "We have been extremely innocent," he had once said to her; "we have only been drinking the champagne of each other's kisses, and we are not yet drunk." She wondered if it was true. But, whether or not, what had Paul to do with it?

The moonlight faded, and sleep fell on her. When she awoke she was in tears.

"I forbid you to go back," Paul cried, attempting to bring her under his boyish authority.

"You forbid!" she said. "I'll do what I like."

"Do it, then," he said, suddenly.

"I'm going to my work."

She burst into tears.

"Do it," said Paul, bitterly; "you're not *my* sister, and I'm glad gran'ma's dead, not to be disgraced. You'll tell that damned bully to send my things."

"Oh, you cruel, cruel boy!" she said, in a last effort to reconcile him.

"Yes, yes," he said—"yes."

He seemed to have changed into manhood in a few hours.

"I'm waiting till you go," he said. "I've warned you."

"I'll sacrifice . . . I'll do it!" she cried, in a brave attempt.

"That's right, old girl," said Paul, rallying her and giving his hand. "Pax! He's not worthy of you; we'll go together and take our things away."

She looked at him sadly through her tears, but said she would go alone. He would only make a scene; and besides, she added, he could trust her. Paul embraced her for a good old girl, and roared himself hoarse for joy.

She went back to The Rookery to *get her luggage*.

As she drove through the chill morning she thought she could really make herself accept this great renunciation. And yet she could accept it only if she accepted as well an amount of suffering of which it would be difficult to distinguish how much would be physical and how much spiritual. It was already one of those moments of vague suffering unappeased when you can measure your pain spatially, in lengths and breadths. A feeling unaccountable and unknown before seemed to rise about her like a tide, and to cover her with its width. She sank back exhausted in the carriage, and looked across cornfields, already white to harvest. She was pale, since love, like hunger, makes us pale. And then she covered her face with her hands. She thought of the suffering of those weeks that had led up to a climax which was this! Her feeling was too blind and genuine even to let her see that her absence would bring him to her feet, and that there lay to her hand the surest policy she could pursue. But she thought of no policy. She knew only that her desire was turning shy, and that the moment was cruel.

She was midway between Little Pines and Great, at that point where the fine larches are, when she seemed to hear amid the noise of the wheels the sound of horses' hoofs. It was Bristol at the gallop, and at a bend of the road he came in sight. He almost dashed into the carriage, but he drew rein in time and stopped simultaneously with the car-

riage. Jessie started from her seat as if she had seen an apparition, and he was as much surprised. But he had his word in time.

"Had a moonlight picnic?" he asked, unable to repress his joy at seeing her. But he altered his tone immediately when he saw her so worn and affrighted.

"Where have you been all night?" he asked. "It was cruel of you. I am responsible for your safety."

"And for Paul's," she added, without looking at him.

"Certainly," he said. "Where is he?"

"I was with him," she said. "We are . . . we are wanting away."

She looked up at him inquiringly.

He was in riding costume with a velvet jacket. His knee was touching the carriage door, and he bent towards her.

"You are so pale," he said, as she turned her face away again. "You are pale and hungry," he repeated. And then to the driver, "Let us go at a trot."

He made his horse trot by the side of the carriage, but she did not look up. They were not far from Great Pines, and he thought it better to go ahead. He lifted his hat, and she saw him ride forward, straight-backed, straight-shouldered, and athletic in his saddle.

"I am going only for my things," she said to herself.

He was at The Rookery gate to help her down. She could not resist feeling that somehow it was like coming home. Bristol paid the carriage fare, but Jessie told the man to wait.

"I'll be down in half an hour," she said. "Wait."

"Thash all ri', mish," replied the cabman.

They went up in silence amid the caw-cawing of the rooks.

"I will help you to pack," he said, with the least tremor in his voice.

"You!" she said, trying to smile; "no, but please do Paul's."

In a few minutes he came into her room.

"May I come in?" he asked, in a voice from which the tremor seemed to have gone.

"Oh, yes," she said, while her back was turned.

She was flinging things into her boxes in heaps, anyway, without pressing them down. She was wishing he would speak.

But he only looked at her fitfully, and saw that she was the prey of some vast sensation, like himself. Yet he could find no word. She was lifting and laying without making any progress, while he was standing immobile in the middle of the room. Suddenly he heard sobs, and in a few moments she was in his arms.

Could they follow wisdom's dim route when their feet seemed already on the shining fields? August was kind, and sent wonderful days and nights. Great Pines said "Shocking!" and Little Pines took up the echo eight miles off, and repeated,

“Shocking!” It seemed to matter little. And, then, people like Lawyer Crack, and even Paul, seemed amazingly unreal.

Many a lazy afternoon he rowed her to Ludd’s farther beach, where the sun’s hot loom wove over them threads of sunbeam silk. She spoke broken words, and he gathered them as the jewel dust of love’s lyrics. She gave him sonnets, and said they were only stagnant pools of poetry. They seemed to be shut out from the world by glimmering walls of phantasy and dream. They hardly looked on the harvest fields, or knew that summer was already being filched and funeralled away. They did not see the reapers—though the reapers saw them—picturesque reapers come to hurry the gold bundles off the fields with drowsy poppies that had been too long nodding to this abrupt sleep. But they saw nothing of it, nor the wains heaped like golden harvest hearses. And many a night the boat lay drifting while he had left the oars to pay his love’s most intimate vows. Ludd itself had become their pool of poetry. Not possible even for a man like him in that pushing fulness of feeling to remember that these bodies are only coats of dust. Glamour of carnal loveliness! Little islets of Ludd, rock circled, that had become isles of the sirens! August remained kind, and sent wonderful days and nights, vanishing into each other through blue haze. If there was time for thought, it was to think again that sin is not dark or black, but full of colour, com-

ing with the sound of drums and too sumptuous scarlet,

“ With its hundred pipers, an’ a’ an’ a’.”

But the amazement and the turmoil of these hours had been too great, and their psychic devastation. Words, gesture, even hearing and sight, were all alike suppressed to let the soul explore, bewildered and bewitched, its own appalling deeps. Pity them, Pharisee. They loved what, happily, you have been kept from loving, wonderful things of the world, and, unlike you, they were not kept from sinning. They lived in the sun and rejoiced in the pagan earth under the light of it. They saw desire lifting phantom hands in supplication for appeasement, and feeling itself the thing most justified of all in the sight of death and life. Solemn? Extremely solemn—more solemn than death. Already for a sign of it, the fluid jewellery of her tears. And the moon came up behind them red and gigantic, but used to hang long low in the wide harvest sky like the face of a great lighted clock to measure the universe’s wonderful, immeasurable hours.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERS LOVE ON THE HOUSE-TOPS

LAWYER CRACK set himself to look after the interests of his young client. He prepared himself for Bristol by a series of imaginary interviews, which usually ended up with the complete annihilation of Bristol. Mr. Crack conjured up his opponent's effigy, and proceeded to examine it on points of law. The effigy failed in every case. "Is *that* the law!" he used to demand imperiously, and chased the apprentice effigy from subterfuge to subterfuge until he knocked it flat like a marionette. But such imaginary conversations were likely to bring him more pleasure than a real dialectical encounter.

He secretly feared the occupant of The Rookery, and took time to develop his plan of attack. He knew him only slightly, but felt that he must be formidable. Mr. Crack had never been out of Great Pines except as a student when he attended a provincial college. Bristol had travelled over Europe, and had drunk coffee in Tunis and tea in Ceylon. Mr. Crack was portly, well over sixty,

and had an abundant wig. The contrast between assailant and assailed was not even physically to his own advantage. Bristol was a stripling, witty and satiric. Lawyer Crack could bear all things except ridicule. Craft, he had enough, but it was of the rude kind of a provincial lawyer. He had no psychology, and Bristol used to say that it was indispensable to success. But Crack had at least vast knowledge of the law, and he would teach those who meddled with it the amazingness of their audacity.

“Eh, Brind?”

Brind encouraged his friend to set about at once, and Paul grew restive at the delay.

“Looke here, Brind,” said Lawyer Crack, assuringly; “it’s like ’e tiger and other beasts of prey that take a spring. They must go back on their haunches a little to gather themselves up.”

So Lawyer Crack went back on his haunches, but Brind wondered how long he was going to remain on them. On the whole he hardly looked a formidable “beast of prey.” He tried hard to discover whether he might have lost sight of any point which would justify the conduct Paul had imputed to Bristol. Even though he knew that he would have all Great Pines to support him in his assault on the strange man who was putting the manners and morals of the district in peril, he hesitated to walk up The Rookery avenue. He questioned Paul again until Paul threatened to discover somebody

more brave. At last, out of self-respect and because Brind kept asking if he had got off "them haunches," he ventured within The Rookery gates. As he approached the main door he was indignant with himself for a nervousness which he could not disguise. He was smoking a cigar, but he threw it half finished on the grass, and would have liked some water.

"Tush!" he said.

He rang the bell loudly, and kept knocking his foot against the doorstep. When the door was opened he asked the servant anxiously if her master could be seen. Only if it was convenient, he said, hoping that it might not be. Unfortunately it was, and he stepped in, taking a breath.

Brind awaited the return of his friend. "Well?" said he, with a twinkle.

"Eh!" said Crack, whose face was flushed after the battle, "that's a man! He's a genius!" He sank back exhausted.

"Seems he's taken it out o' ye," said Brind, laughing.

"No, no," said Crack, looking steadily on the floor. "We are quite excellent friends. The boy's wrong."

"Was he civil?" asked Brind.

"He's the kind that must be humoured," said Crack.

"O ho! ho!" laughed Banker Brind, as he rolled out, leaving Crack in a sort of stupor.

The truth was that Lawyer Crack had begun very bravely and even loudly by demanding explanation on the part of his young client. He had been commissioned by Mr. Paul Ring to make inquiries and perhaps threats. Here he noticed Bristol smiling, and he instantly stopped.

"Making inquiries and threats?" said Bristol. "Come here to the light, Mr. Crack."

And he set him on a chair at the window where the sun could pour down on his abundant wig.

"I have seen many men," said Bristol, "with no hair for their head. You, sir, are the first I have seen with no head for his hair!"

Lawyer Crack looked astonished, as if he had not quite caught the significance of the words. He tried to join in Bristol's laugh until he thought it was perhaps at his own expense.

"Come, come, sir," he said.

"Well?" asked Bristol, who was walking up and down the room, reading on a sheet of notepaper.

"I have come on business, sir," said Lawyer Crack, manfully. "Mr. Paul Ring——"

"Mr. Crack," interrupted Bristol, tearing into small pieces the sheet of notepaper, "if a lawyer of your experience, your considerable and varied experience, listens attentively to the drivel of a vain, obstinate boy, I am altogether surprised. It was precisely to-day that I decided to consult you on certain matters (and here he pointed to the torn paper in his hand) and affairs in connection with

my two wards, but of course if you are already abetting one of them in foolish and headstrong conduct, I will have to look for another."

"Ah!" said Lawyer Crack, more astonished than ever. "I . . . I assure you, sir, I don't know the facts."

"I know," said Bristol, "you don't know the facts."

"I have come to know them," replied Crack.

"Without being asked," answered Bristol. "Singular! Are these the new methods, Mr. Crack?"

Here he offered him a cigar, and began to talk on the topics of the day, on politics and the last great crime. But Crack was always harking back to the Badcock estate.

"Not at all, not at all," said Bristol; "you must be already too busy. I shall find some other one."

"I assure you, sir, I shall be most willing to co-operate," said Crack, convinced that Paul was a very headstrong and foolish boy, and full of resentment for having been made to assume such an attitude towards Bristol. The great man was actually on the point of *consulting* him! If he had only waited another day——

"My dear sir," continued Crack——

"My dear sir," interrupted Bristol. "It will now be your business to send that boy back here at once, and then perhaps we may talk over his grievances together. Miss Ring and I are awaiting him. Perhaps it is not a light thing that we should

suffer the vulgar and ribald slanders that are going about? ”

“ I assure you, sir, *I* have had no part in such nonsense. I think I know the worth of a man like *you* in our midst,” said Crack, in a burst of generosity.

Bristol was opening the door for him.

“ I am glad I have had the pleasure of . . . the pleasure of——”

Bristol, however, did not wait to hear in what the pleasure consisted, and shut his door. Lawyer Crack had the pleasure of going down the avenue while thinking a multitude of things. He had a confused sense of his inferiority, but it was well counterbalanced by the prospect of solid advantage to be got soon out of the Badcock estates. He was going to be consulted. Perhaps before the week was out he would be filing important documents, and tendering advice to the extraordinary man.

“ Such an eye! ” Crack said to himself, as he left The Rookery grounds. And he turned round to admire the magnificent old trees, and the broad avenues, and the general aspect of the well-being and comfort of the place. It was ridiculous to suppose that Paul’s incoherent indignation could be of any importance at all. He went back to Great Pines, and, although Brind’s malicious incredulity was disagreeable, Lawyer Crack set himself to contradict right and left all the strange rumours that were perturbing the town. It was soon on every

lip that Paul was in the wrong, and that Bristol and Jessie were anxious for his return. Everybody knew in due course that Jessie had spent a whole night in the effort to persuade her foolish brother. The fact that Lawyer Crack was actively engaged dispersing all calumnies was enough to secure their disappearance. Paul was universally blamed. Bristol was certainly the last man to go and carry him bodily off. He rather let him starve out in his miserable garret.

When he went back to Lawyer Crack the oppressed boy found his last hope gone. The old lawyer was rubbing his hands.

"Well, my boy, when will we see you back at The Rookery?"

Paul looked amazed, and knew by the lawyer's tone that something had happened.

"I've seen Mr. Bristol," Crack continued. "My dear young sir, I advise you to go back to-day. You mustn't think you're wiser than us. There's a good——"

"A good boy, I suppose!" cried Paul, fiercely swearing.

"Give in, my young friend," said Crack, paternally. "Mr. Bristol has doubtless good security for your money, and if so, is within his right. You don't understand these things."

"Give in!" cried Paul, in scorn and mockery, "I'll see you all cursed first! Where is Dr. Muster?"

"Dr. Muster has removed to Surprise Lane, my

young friend; I have not seen him, but I am sure he will side with Mr. Bristol."

"Will he?" said Paul, "not when he really knows."

And he ran out to go to Dr. Muster, but Lawyer Crack called him back.

"Stop," said he, reflecting.

The truth was that Crack had purposely refrained from visiting Dr. Muster in case the old doctor might inform Bristol that he had been making inquiries in an underhand manner about the Badcock estate. Crack knew, moreover, that it was not Dr. Muster who was the leading personage. But since matters had now changed so much it would not be out of place to win Dr. Muster's confidence as well. He would venture to ask details from him, and become gradually initiated until the great day when Bristol put the whole management in his hands.

"Let us go, then," he said to Paul; and they went together.

On the road Crack remarked what an irreparable loss the township was suffering in Dr. Muster's retiral from active life.

"He is failing, I see," said Crack—"daily ageing, almost hourly growing feeble, they say. And his wife, poor woman! she is never seen now, a hopeless bed-ridden, and too nervous to see any one. Ah, life! my young friend, what is it? A vapour, as we are told."

Dr. Muster, aged and worn indeed, was looking out of his window, and saw them approach. He held up his hands in dismay, and went terror-stricken to his wife to tell her that their secret must now be out. Here was Paul with Crack. What could it mean but the preliminaries to their arrest? Widow Busk, who had at last for real reasons of feebleness taken to her bed, felt a cold shiver passing over her under the blankets.

"Oh, oh! my friend," she said, "it is too . . . too much!" and turned choking with fear, while Dr. Muster hid himself in his room.

But Lawyer Crack and Mr. Paul Ring were announced, and he had to meet them.

"What is it?" he asked, before he was rightly in the room.

Lawyer Crack took the old, shaking man by the shoulder, and asked him how he was.

"Very . . . well," said Dr. Muster.

"And your wife?"

"Very . . . ill," said Dr. Muster. "What is it?" And he looked aghast from the one to the other.

"Oh, very little," said Crack, "simply a small difference, shall I call it, between our young friend here and our friend Mr. Bristol."

Dr. Muster was able to take breath while Lawyer Crack proceeded to refer to him and Bristol as his "respected coadjutors" in the Badcock estate. Paul heard these phrases in anger mingled with

surprise, but Dr. Muster followed only vaguely Crack's introductory explanation.

"You know, Mr. Bristol is about to consult me, has, I may say, consulted me already, sir."

"How are you, my dear boy?" asked Dr. Muster, laying his hand on Paul, who at that moment seemed preparing to jump on Crack.

"Yes, yes," said Crack, "he will know to give in."

"Will I?" said Paul, shaking off Dr. Muster's hand.

"What do you think, doctor? Will you not advise our young friend?"

Dr. Muster looked vaguely from the one to the other, and murmured that he was a feeble old man. But when Lawyer Crack pressed him to save the headstrong boy he began to understand that the subject in hand was Paul's quarrel with Bristol.

"A most scrupulous man," he exclaimed, turning to Paul.

"You see!" said Crack, with his eye on the disobedient youth.

"Yes . . . yes . . . give in," advised Dr. Muster, at last awake. "Do give in . . . dear boy, for your own sake."

And he heaved a sigh which seemed to contain the breath of a hundred troubles past and to come.

"You hear?" asked Crack.

But Paul left them both, and went, enraged and broken-hearted, to seek Maud, while Dr. Muster, at

length relieved from Crack, was able to convince himself that his own peril was not yet come.

"What it is," he exclaimed, as he tottered to his wife, "to have 'wickedly rejoiced'!"

After Jessie's visit that night Maud had remained the prey of horrible fears for Paul's safety. She had heard nothing since, and had not seen Paul. Two days had elapsed since Jessie's visit, but she did not venture near The Rookery to ask questions. She hardly ventured out at all, and no one told her Paul was so near. Once, indeed, she went to the old uplands, sought him at the old trysting-places by the hedges and highways and down by the lake shore, but all in vain. She could not confide her misery to her aunt, who seemed to become more bitter every day. What had happened? Was he lost or murdered?

The truth was Paul had been too anxious to settle everything before he told her of his quarrel with Bristol. She had been ill with headache, giddiness, nausea, and, indeed, had been displaying symptoms of strychnine poisoning, although no one seemed to know it, and least of all herself. Paul would do nothing to agitate her, and wished to wait till he could show himself triumphant over their common enemy. If he had known of Jessie's visit, he might have come quicker. And, indeed, now that every one had turned against him, he decided to go at once. He would have to admit to her that he was without resource, but he hoped they would

devise a plan together. Luckily Miss Pilking was out when he arrived. Maud heard his footstep and ran palpitating to the door.

"Oh, Paul!" and she burst into tears in his arms.

"I thought you were dead," she said. "What has happened?"

He questioned her, and led her in. He was alarmed at her grey pallor.

"Maudy, you are ill. I know it!" he said, excitedly.

"Nothing," she replied, "but I've been miserable. Tell me. Tell me."

He told her everything, and she questioned him anxiously on the upshot.

He was full of all sorts of wild projects.

Let them get married at once, for instance! But he had to admit that he was without money. Crack would do nothing for them, neither would Dr. Muster. She suggested Brind. Brind might give them a loan.

"The very man!" cried Paul.

"Oh, stop," said Maud; "let us wait."

She suggested his sister, but he curled his lip. When she proposed that he should try to make friends with Bristol again he was visibly annoyed, and she asked forgiveness.

"Can I not stay here?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Paul," she said with a look of fear; "aunt is dreadful, Paul."

They seemed to be in the grips of misfortune, and at the very moment Aunt Pilking, like their evil genius, walked in.

"Eh!" she exclaimed in the doorway at sight of Paul. She held up her stick at him menacingly as he came forward to shake hands.

"Fye, for shame, sir! What ye doin' here again?"

"Oh, nothing, Miss Pilking," said Paul; "seeing Maudy, that's all."

Aunt Pilking threw her niece a fierce glance.

"Shame!" says she. "Out o' my parlour!"

"What!" said Paul, looking at her wildly, and divining perhaps for the first time what Maud was enduring.

"*That!*" she replied, and hit him with her stick.

"O-h!" cried Maud.

"*That!*" repeated Aunt Pilking, and reached her stick to chastise Maud too.

Paul seized it from her withered fingers, and sent her tottering.

"Murder!" cried Miss Pilking, limping to the window.

"Come on, Maud," said Paul; "leave her at once."

"Oh, Aunt Pilking and Paul, it's nothing, be friends," cried Maud. "He's not going to stay here, aunt; he's going to live in the village, that's all."

"Out of my parlour!" demanded the terrible

little woman, addressing Paul, "and never put your villain foot in 't again."

Maud signed to him that it would be better to go, and he went to please her. What could he do for her? She would be homeless, like himself, if she left her aunt. They would meet, they would meet, her eyes told him, soon, down by the lake shore.

So he went, and called again on Lord Sother to protest, and to demand money. But Lord Sother was tipsy, and was reeling round his room.

"It's my money you've got," said Paul, indignantly.

"*Your* money! Hey!" said his lordship, "the boy's drunk!"

It was useless attempting to bring him to reason. Paul went back to Lawyer Crack, and laid his case before him again with such earnestness that Crack began to think there might be something in it. At anyrate it would do no harm to have two irons in the fire. He agreed to question Lord Sother; but when they went, his lordship was no better. Lawyer Crack almost turned at the door, and asked Paul if he could expect truth from inebriate lips. Besides, his lordship personally insulted Lawyer Crack by seizing his wig and congratulating him on its size.

"R-r-right, sir!" he said. "Take a wig, it's like taking time by the forelock!"

Lawyer Crack would hear no more, and went back, heaping advice on the deluded Paul.

Paul sat in his attic all day wondering what to do.

He was too proud to surrender to Bristol, and he had no wish to beg from Brind. Yet he was without resource. He had not even a change of clothes, and he was living on the charity of his landlady. One day he walked boldly into The Rookery, but Jessie and Bristol had gone out. Paul seized his books and clothes, and got them sent to his lodgings. Black Harry was willing to undertake the risk. Neither Bristol nor Jessie knew, indeed, that Paul had been there. They seemed to have forgotten his existence, and the days were passing. Paul was in a serious plight for money, and he had been borrowing from Black Harry. Maud implored him to go back, but he settled down to his books. He told her to keep up heart, because Brind was going to give him a loan on his prospects. It was high time to be working steadily for that Army Examination which was to take place in a few months.

But it was difficult for Maud to keep up heart. Miss Pilking was busy with her, and she was being slowly poisoned.

Bristol had said he would watch over her, but when your detective falls in love he is apt, like a stupid dog, to let the scent cool, and his interest in dangerous persons temporarily lessens and disappears. And those were precisely the days of Bristol's poorest record. Miss Pilking was having her own way.

"Oh, stop, aunt, I'm sick and my head's turning

round," cried Maud at *three* in the morning; "give me . . . give me a . . . oh, my head!"

"Eh!" ejaculated Aunt Pilking, and turned on her side.

Paul grew anxious about Maud's curious expression of face. She had the vertigo when she walked, and always felt inclined to fall forwards. Unaccountable movements took place in the fibres of all her limbs. She had new symptoms every day. The nights were sleepless and terrible. She awoke affrighted from sudden dreams, and it used to take her long to discover whether the wizen figure of her aunt lying beside her was part of her hallucination. "Where am I?" she used to shriek, until she woke Miss Pilking, who broke into abuse on her. During the day she was ravenous for food, but even when she got it, she used to grow worse after a meal. When she walked she felt as if she was walking on the air. She became, moreover, strangely excited. Instead of Paul wooing her she was wooing Paul. She suggested they should get married, but he thought now that it would be better to wait till after his Examination.

"Paul, dear Paul," she said, and kissed him frantically.

"You will go to the doctor at once," said Paul, "but not to Muster. You will go to Sprig."

"No, dear, no," she said, "I am only excited about your suffering."

"Is your aunt hurting you?" he cried, fiercely.

"No," she said—"no."

In desperation Paul went to a chemist and bought a tonic. He persuaded her to take it.

She was weak, and it would strengthen her. She took it in mouthfuls every day.

Her eyes were dazzling.

"Maud!" he said, affrighted.

"I am only nervous," she said.

The bottle for the tonic was filled and refilled. It seemed to be a kind of syrup. But it was decided on that loud day in Great Pines, when the jury sat, that it must have contained strychnine as well, and so helped the accumulation of the poison. Indeed, the chemist himself gave unmistakable evidence. Meantime, Maud said she was improving.

And after all, life in the garret became a great deal more than tolerable for Paul. Aunt Pilking was skilfully evaded, and Maud came every day to help him to attack the army subjects. And although, as she mounted the stair, her legs seemed like heavy weights, she never let him know it. She worked the mathematics and French verbs with him while pains were crawling through her head. Paul began to forget his persecutors, although he knew the day of recompense must not be far off.

Brind had lent him money, and out of the goodness of his heart had not asked security for it. Let the boy take it, thought the sturdy banker, and God help his pluck whether he is in the wrong or not. He had even promised Paul £500 in a fit of gener-

osity, but Paul was too proud to accept more. He was working hard, and told the banker he would repay everything soon. Maud and he sat together for hours at mathematics, although, indeed, *permutations* and *combinations* of their laughter seemed the chief problem. He told Maud that after all it was better they waited. He would put on glory with his battle coat! As for her, she saw him already a colonel in gold and scarlet. If the Sandhurst people would only see that you may become a good soldier without French verbs and mathematics!

Will your excellent pass men, with poor bodies, who muster ranks of irregular verbs for you, muster with equal skill ranks of another sort? Will they sit a horse, O military friends, or fling a baton into enemies' ranks, like some Grand Condé, and charge after to recover it?

Paul thought not, and Maud agreed. When she put him through his tenses they both burst out laughing, and the tenses seemed the silliest things in the world.

"If I may love," said Maud.

"Of course," shouted Paul, with a few curious reminiscences.

His exercises were love-letters to her, and she was too easy with his faults. Alas! examinations are not passed in that way.

When Maud could escape they worked all morning and afternoon, and went boating on Loch Ludd

at twilight. Not once or twice they heard the soft splash of another pair of oars. Paul once rowed across to find out whom it might be, and as he approached called out a loud hollow. He came nearer, gliding very softly, until the gunwales were parallel. They saw two figures in their midnight embrace. Paul, not knowing who they were, was going to be playful.

"Fun, isn't it?" he said, good-humouredly. Bristol lifted his great head and looked at them haggardly and strangely, as if he hardly recognised them. And Jessie, rising as from some midsummer night's dream, with her tresses falling over her, gave a shrill cry when she saw her brother a moment in the moonlight. Paul drew off with a hideous hollow laugh, which went echoing along Ludd's shore, while his oars whipped the water to silver. Ludd, to be sure, was wide enough for a whole midsummer night's carnival. Paul and Maud went rolling back on its warm waves, silent in love and anger under the amazing sky, till Maud fell asleep, and started suddenly, crying, "Oh, Paul, where are we?"

CHAPTER VI

PLAYS AT PITCH AND TOSS

"I BELIEVE they're married," said Mrs. Crippen to Miss Pilking.

"Who?" asked Miss Pilking, angrily, bobbing from side to side of her cane chair.

"*That* Jessie and Bristol," replied Mrs. Crippen. "At least it's being said they should be, though Crack denies it, and says the brother's wrong, and won't go back, though Bristol wants to whip him back."

"An' I'd help 'm," said Miss Pilking, shaking her head.

"Ah well," said Mrs. Crippen, "Bristol has strange ways, and it may be all right, but there's been carryings on in August, my word, from what I know."

Lawyer Crack, indeed, was extremely discreet and had already rescued the honour of his distinguished coadjutor in the Badcock estate. Thanks to him, all the ugly rumours were running out of Great Pines like the town rats. His authority was sufficient to allay that scandal, and "Crack says it

isn't true!" was on every lip. Public censure began to be directed against Paul and Maud, and Miss Pilking received sympathy as being the aunt of an undutiful niece. It was said that new attempts had been made to win Paul back, but that Maud was abetting him. Meantime the couple at The Rookery kept a dignified silence, and the weeks were passing.

Strangely enough, their silence towards the public was the counterpart of a reserve between themselves, for which they had not been getting credit. It came slowly and imperceptibly, like the chillness which was already falling through the September air. Those were halcyon days indeed, but of a disquieting kind.

"He is ill," she thought.

But she looked forward with anxiety to the return of his impassiveness. She thought he had been kindled for ever.

"She is not . . . she is not——" he said, and looked about for an adjective to give precision to his delusion and suspicion.

At anyrate, he began to feel troubled by the importunity of her love. She invited him and invited him submissively, as if he were a slave-dealer. Yet he remained silent for hours.

"Oh no, no, no!" he said. "That one mad moment!"

It all looked like a frozen dream, and he began to wonder how his reason could have lain so long

obscured. He had said she was nothing to him, but it looked true only now. Long ago his one fear and object of scorn had been the life of emotion. He had laid up well his stores of knowledge, had read his Spinoza, and armed himself against irrational instincts. But he was now in bewilderment. He who used to sit patiently picking the oakum of thought, and who used to say it was a man's highest work, had been heaping up sensation for himself.

Ach! he said uneasily, and as if rising from nightmare, I might have known it. Like the common rest of them, I have been wishing a personal sensation. I have got it—and it's nausea.

He kept looking at her. His gaze was fixed, half alluring, half repelling again, as she had to admit to herself, but all fascinating. He seemed to be retracing his steps in a few minutes back to the point of indifference. He marvelled at the rapidity of his disgust. And yet he knew that pathos was lurking not far off. She behaved so wifely, and sat beside him at his work. Wife? The word was worse than ominous. Things, to be sure, were at a sensitive point. His words became mordant, and Jessie tried to hide their meaning. She sat beside him on a stool at his feet, but he moved away. She put her hand on his head, but he felt it like cold metal.

"I don't like that," he said.

"You used to, Jacob," she said, and looked at him in surprise.

Jacob, he thought; how dare she!

Next day he found a poem on his desk.

LOVE'S CALAMITY.

Love said my soul is like a clock,
To tell what hour he please.
My heart, an easy lock
For his swift keys,
Wherein he entered to make mock
O' the poor jewels, crying, "Only these!"

And now my face is as a dial for the printage
Of the shadow of his hours,
An ever new-made medal of the mintage
Of his powers.
My heart, a wonder ruin of the vintage
Of his flowers.

"Don't publish it," he said; "they don't understand metaphor, though they pretend to enjoy Shakespeare and their Bible, two long metaphorical webs."

She remained heart-broken in his room. He looked up at his books lying silent in impassive rows and offering a mild rebuke. His true life was there, and Jessie seemed an encumbrance in their presence. He took down his Spinoza, and opened it at a suitable text.

"Desire is each man's essence."

He turned to her.

"Desire is each man's essence," he said; "also each woman's, evidently. More's the pity. It is the Great Destroyer."

She smiled faintly, and said "Yes," but he saw she understood nothing.

"Good God!" he said, when she went, "when will this end?"

She became bowed in humiliation and wonder, and pain. She loved him still to the full, and felt eager for sacrifice. One night the lamp was between them, while he sat in the softer light cast by the crimson hangings of it. She thought he looked alluring with the allurements of the first days. She looked across with the blush flooding her face, and she knew that it only illumined the disturbed places of her soul. He was evidently studying the blush. She could have fled, but she tried to smile. He began to smile himself, and it reassured her. And yet when the smile was moving up both their faces like a climbing plant, she was startled when he said, in a tone that Savonarola might have used, "After all, lust is four-footed." Was he really in a great struggle with himself? And she? She was trying to withstand so much at that moment, the tribulation and repulsion of feeling; and to become so much, a lost delicacy and many an old faith irrecoverable.

"No . . . no, let me . . . let me," she cried, piteously; "I can . . . can do nothing!"

And she was in his arms again, while he was thinking in amazement how virtue is like a dragging anchor.

"Look you," he said to himself, when he was relieved, "the naïve Ronsard appears to be right—*Pour être bien aimé, il faut aimer bien peu.*" He contin-

ued in this moral see-saw. He looked about for the lost landmarks of his reason. Yes, they were there; he was again sighting them, nearing them again.

What am I? he asked, as he felt the tides of emotion rolling out. He had long stopped talking about sin. Call it blood-poisoning, he said. But he was no longer able to study dispassionately the sins of others. Miss Pilking came with news, maybe, of advancing crime, but he ordered her off without hearing her, and she went out terrified. Dr. Muster came to ask "a li-t-t-le . . . cle . . . clemency." But he said to him, "Away!" and he tottered down the avenue. Lord Sother, having run through his loan, came to negotiate a second, but he, too, was waved off before he got near the door, and went gesticulating to the gate. Even Lawyer Crack, anxious to take over the duties of the Badcock estate, was surprised to be sent away. Everybody was sent away. When Jessie came back to put her hand on him, he said to her too, almost savagely, "Away!"

Love's scarlet vintage, then, was really now at the black lees. He almost told her plainly that her presence was unstimulating and poor. Each knew that mutual suspicion was quickening.

"I say," she faltered one morning, "I am beginning to think——"

"You are beginning to think!" he said; "it's safer than beginning to feel."

"You know," she said, "I saw you yesterday with Miss Mossman."

"You are extremely jealous," he said.

"I think——" she went on.

But he did not wait to listen, and rose in scorn over the littleness of it all. She held him back, however, and spoke loudly, letting her voice rise so that indefatigable papa heard it upstairs, and jumped out of bed. "I have been . . . ruined!" she said, white with excitement. "You cruel Tormentor."

"Ah, no," he said, "the supreme Tormentor is Beauty like your own."

"My brother!" she said, "I have been false to him; I will go and tell him everything."

She was pausing at the door, struck by his disdain. She was opening the door.

"Stay!" he said, aghast.

She came running back to him to ask forgiveness. But at that moment of a reconciliation that had been too loud, in stepped indomitable papa, attracted downstairs once more by their voices. He came groping along by the picture frames, half stumbling, and lamenting his blindness in bitter cries as he came.

"Wha-at is it? Who-oo is to stay? Oh, Jacob!"

"Father!" said Bristol, loosening himself from Jessie, "Miss Ring is a little excited about her brother again."

"No, my son, no; it was a woman's voice about herself, most passionate it was."

"Are you here again?" asked the blind man, addressing Jessie. "If I could only see. I have

heard laughter in the night. O God! My son, think of my age and my blindness!"

Bristol tried to quieten him.

"Where are you?" he called, groping for Jessie.

Bristol signed to Jessie to go, and she passed nimbly out, although the blind man made an almost successful spring towards her.

When he refused to desist from his loud crying, Bristol carried him upstairs, again vociferating, to his room.

"You . . . you blackguard and parricide!" he cried, trying to shake himself free, while the servants looked on astonished.

"Thim jint's and limbs o' his," Black Harry was saying to the women, "what can 'e old pa do aginst 'em?"

But papa gave considerable trouble all day. When he insisted on making further excursions Bristol strapped him to his bed, where he lay like Gulliver. And then, like a dutiful son, he carried the meals up.

He went to his study and sat down, asking himself how he was going to be delivered out of it all. He had brought irreparable dispeace into his own life, and it seemed to him that almost all his pleasure was passed. I have seen life, like a most cunning packer of fruit, he said, lay all the fine things at the top. Jessie knew that he was holding himself as well as herself in a great disdain.

But his repudiation of it all was not accompanied

by theological scruples of any sort. It was only the recoil of an intellectual nature out of the mess of instinct. He would have offended a theological person. Good dullard, he would have said, make yourself acquainted with biological secrets, study ganglions and the movements of irresponsible nerves. Go, good dullard! Will your dry body judge mine that is full? It is like the Arctic regions sitting in judgment on the Tropics. And if nerves grow hungry for sensation they must be fed. "Design," you know.

His excavations about the very roots of life were carried on in another way. I see, he said in the midst of his own recoil, that what you call ethics may really have its beginnings in physical disgust. It is our injured æsthetic sense that starts moral progress. Have I done wrong? Obviously no, but civilisation says obviously yes; and civilisation is always quarrelling with nature. Civilisation has triumphed only in making it all very ugly and inconvenient. But a man doesn't require the world's help to discover the delusion of his feeling. I have discovered it already.

Had he? Not yet fully, because, as he both knew and felt, an emotion half satisfied is wilder than ever. Believe me, he said, the sense of Beauty—I see I have some of it after all!—requires a repetition of instances. It is the tragedy of marriage. A sense of carnal loveliness, really alive, must pass from type to type. Nature is distinctly absurd.

Desire passes to nausea, and nausea to desire. . . .
I am passing back to . . . Fan!

Fan knew it, and wondered if he were passing back "pure." "Alas, alas!" she said, and hoped and hoped.

"Ach, Fan," he said, "such a warm little hand!"

The long days had been passing slowly indeed since the time he had told her that Jessie Ring's stay was to be only very temporary at The Rookery. Seer Mossman, lost in his dreams, did not measure the days so painfully. The two women used to see each other walking in the gardens separated by the great walls. But the walls were scarcely high enough to keep out that mounting-tide of their jealousy. Bristol began to go to The Elms through the postern. If Fan had asked herself why she still loved him she might have appealed to her childhood. But the excuses came for him one by one. He was a faithful guardian, she said to herself, and the fatal Jessie, let the fact be got over as it might, was his ward. A guardian might surely have his ward as guest. Paul's absence, indeed, might cause a blush of surprise and anxiety, but after all whose business was it? It was not hers. It was hers to trust. And when she heard that the rumours were quieted down, and that Lawyer Crack was vigorously defending the reputation of his friend, she was ashamed for having believed the wicked calumnies.

By her belief in them she had been false to him,

she who should have known him better than them all. Yet Mother Rachel was always disturbing her with new suspicions, and even told Seer Mossman that he should be ashamed of his neglect of his daughter.

"'Deed," says she, "ye've a darter as well as yer fantastics. That Black Harry, his man, has been winkin' at me whole weeks because 'e knows what's going on the other side them glowerin' walls! If I 'ad a darter I'd a drowned her like a silly kitten than let her drive to an end this way."

Mother Rachel spoke as if Bristol had promised something definite to Fan.

"My daughter?" inquired Seer Mossman, looking steadily.

"Yes, yer darter."

"'It shall be more tolerable——'"

"Mercy," said Mother Rachel, "when 'a begins that way!"

"'If he offends one of these little ones,'" said the old man, "'it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon.'"

"Well, if ye like," said Mother Rachel; "I would na' put it in the same way. But what's we to do against the backslider?"

"'Making clean the *outside* of the cup and platter!'" exclaimed the Seer, imperiously.

"I've washed yer cups and platters for a score o' years," said Mother Rachel, indignantly, "and what's ye got to girn at me now for?"

“ ‘It were better that a millstone——’ ” continued the old man.

“ Faugh! ” said Mother Rachel retreating. “ What a man for a footther! ”

“ Wait,” said Fan, when her old nurse grew more excited, “ he’ll come this week. He has been here, and you have not seen him. He’s very good.”

“ Ah, well,” said Mother Rachel, “ it maybe they’re tellin’ lies on ’im. The Lord help me if I’ve believed them! ”

Bristol had certainly not lost admiration for Seer Mossman, whose ecstasy might have suited better the age of cloisters. Great Piners used to call him “ a daft man,” and for that opinion alone Bristol held them in contempt. With a power of entering into diverse mental states, he stood wondering at the old man’s peace. Evidently for Seer Mossman, he said, reality passes beyond touch and sight. And who knows? Bristol had seen him raise his hands as if towards a phantom crucifix, and say with one of his fine gestures, “ Settled there for ever among the solemnities! ” And he had a pretty phantasy—that the crown of thorns was taken fresh from the soft April boughs, dewy and white and scarlet, and that Jesus went thus to Calvary with a wonderful rich garland about his brows—“ Here’s for the painters! ” he used to say with a solemn smile.

Bristol called one September night, and came unobserved into the room, when he discovered that the old man was busily engaged in dramatising a

Scriptural incident. His large white head was bending over a book beneath a lamp, and he was reading the passage about the washing of the disciples' feet. At his left side on the floor there was a bowl of water and a towel. Bristol thought it was the strangest sight he had seen. For the simple old man rose as if to make obeisance to an invisible guest, and, wishing evidently to discover the very sensation and emphasis of Peter, he exclaimed in a tone of surprise, "*Thou shalt never wash my feet!*"

After a pause he let drop both hands, saying, "Not my feet only, but my hands and my head!" Bristol instinctively retreated, and went out where the September night wind sat hissing in the tree-tops. But he came back full of his own bitterness, reconnoitring Fan, and feeling within himself something alien and surprised.

"My son!" said the Seer, "here is a new book on Immortality."

"Immortality," said Bristol; "it's like a cry of *Encore!*"

"Ah," said the Seer, as he went smiling out, "it's Fan you want. Love won't talk theology, eh?"

Fan came in.

"Fan, Fan," cried Bristol, "I am wanting you!"

She was startled by his look. He was weary, worn out in the fatigue of it all. Yet his smile lay hush about the eyes and lips. It was not often indeed that he used to allow himself dream. Yet

when he chose, or rather when he did not choose, he had the look *rêveur* which pleases women.

"Are you ill?" she asked, in a tone that meant real alarm.

He took her hand. She was thinking how many men could be made out of him, and he was asking himself if he was going to turn maudlin. Such a warm little hand!

Virtue getting crowded out.

"She!" said Fan, whispering it.

"No, no," he said.

Anyway, she thought it had come at last, the long-awaited-for, dearer for the waiting. She said to herself that he had need of her. She seemed by a glance or an eyefall to be giving him back the light of their wonderful childhood. He could be sincere in a hundred different and conflicting states. He was so then. Desire is never anything else than sincere.

Such a warm little hand!

"Yes, yes," he was saying, "it *is* true."

So many dangerous schemes, like broken bridges tumbling down!

Her reproaches, if she had spoken them, would have been merited, and the future would say it—the future which, like the inevitable future that lies before all crime, is somehow already a past and irreclaimable. He knew it, but could do nothing. He could only feel the tides of emotion rolling in.

She had come very near.

"No, no," he was saying in answer to her whispers, "just . . . my . . . just my Fan, as it used to be."

At that moment Seer Mossman entered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and drew back, but then came eagerly, stretching forth his hands—"My . . . my children!"

BOOK III

COLLAPSE OF THE HORNET'S NEST

CHAPTER I

DESCRIES TROUBLES AHEAD

It was piquant to see Miss Pilking driving up to The Rookery in her donkey-cart, and bringing her money chests to Bristol. He had not asked them. But sometimes he found a box waiting him in his study, and generally an envelope containing the key was discovered stuffed into one of the open drawers of his writing-cabinet. It was invariably when he was out that she came. When he unlocked these chests he was sure to find surprising quantities of gold and often jewels. This is extremely serious, he thought, and a certain inquietude began to possess him. He remained whole days indoors in order to see her, but she ceased coming. He was unwilling to go to her house. I have nothing to do with her, he said. When he began to go out again he found more treasure on his return, until his nights became sleepless. Obviously, she was wishing to buy his silence, but he repudiated the notion that he had anything to do with the crime. He had forgotten her existence for months, and he had judged from the beginning that she might be hallucinated.

Miss Pilking possessed considerable treasure, which she kept in a deep, roomy press that Maud had never been allowed to enter. She was carrying it all to Bristol because she became terrified that he might be turning against her. His refusal to see her led her to imagine all sorts of trouble and persecution that might be awaiting her. Hallucinated she was, and she had already done what was past undoing, but her own safety was still a clear idea in her brain. She decided to sacrifice everything. She sold her donkey-cart, and had begun to wear her oldest clothes with a view to economy. She was flitting about "like a fright," the terror of the children of Great Pines. They used to meet her on the road with her bonnet awry, speaking to herself volubly as she came along. When they screamed after her, she shook her stick. People said she was behaving as if she hadn't a penny in the world, whereas every one knew she was rich.

It was autumn, and it was turning cold and damp. The wind was hewing the trees. Paul felt the cold wind in his garret, especially when he sat up at night over his army work. Every one was forecasting a terrible winter. "Ludd'll be froze over," they said. It had been unusually cold at the fall of summer, and the sun was already turning rusty for December. The snow darkness, the snow grey-ness may be upon us immediately. It is to be hoped the squirrels have laid in good store of nuts. The farmers were turning in gladly to their firesides

from the bleak fields. Coals were getting dear, and some of the poorer people were burning wood. Coals were getting so dear that in spite of increasing rheumatism old Miss Pilking became extremely sparing of fuel, and likewise Dr. Muster. Great Pines felt as much surprised over the sudden impoverisation of the one as of the other. The worst of it was that Miss Pilking's poverty began seriously to affect Maud, who required nourishment. But Aunt Pilking said they had lost all their money, and were beggars, so to speak. She wished to remove to a less pretentious flat. Maud lay shivering and full of distress both of body and mind. She had turned gradually ill, although nobody knew how ill she was except herself. She even concealed it from her aunt out of fear of bitter words.

But the truth was that Aunt Pilking had become perfectly docile and motherly. Simultaneously with Bristol's refusal to see her she began to conciliate Maud and Paul. It was then that the poisoning must have ceased. But perhaps it was too late.

"Aunt is quite changed," said Maud to Paul; "she is quite kind now."

Aunt Pilking, indeed, was turning so kind that, to the surprise of the boy and girl, she urged them to get married at once. Everything had changed, and Maud was no longer pinched and harassed in the night.

"Dear old aunty," said Maud in forgiveness. She felt glad that Paul saw so little of her in those

days. When she thought he was coming she rose out of bed.

"I am feeling better every day, dear," said the pale girl. "Do go to your work."

"Oh, are you?" said Paul, excitedly. "You said so weeks ago. You said it was the heat. It's cold now, and you're worse, Maudy."

But she implored him to let her be, and he went to his chemist to buy another bottle of the "World's Magic Tonic," which was sure to aggravate her state.

Miss Pilking used to shed tears unseen. Maud told Paul that she must be turning doated. She used to sit up all night, and weep on Maud's bed. The nights were terrible for Maud. When she lay she felt as if she were turning round and round. Once she could not deliver herself from the hallucination that she was hung up to the roof by her feet. And yet she appeared to enjoy intervals of perfect health. She became even elated and brilliant, and encouraged Paul. He agreed that she must be getting well, and it was then he proposed to go to London for a two months' coaching for his Army Examination. It was necessary, because he might have been working altogether on the wrong lines. Since Maud continued in high spirits, it was agreed that he should leave at once. Aunt Pilking stuffed twenty pounds into his hand. But he had no need of it, because Banker Brind's loan was lasting well. Paul knew that the day of vengeance was not far

off. He had heard whispers that the inmates of The Rookery were not wholly in Paradise. Once he thought he should go and carry his sister off, if there was yet time. But his provocation had been too great, and he let things wait. He had sat doggedly at his work with a self-restraint which gave promise that he would be a good soldier. He knew that, no matter what had happened, his money was his own, and that no one could keep it from him. Too anxious not to lose a year, he sat quietly preparing himself, trying to put out of his thoughts everything that would distract him. Maud's illness, to be sure, was a cruel thorn in his side; but she was getting better, it seemed.

"Go, go, dear," she said; "I will write every day."

Aunt Pilking also advised him to go, and stuffed another twenty pounds into his hand. Paul doubted whether, when he came back, he would find Aunt Pilking alive.

She was flitting about like a ghost, and started at the least noise in the room. A footstep on the stairs made her jump from her seat. She seemed often dazed, but as often she used to look very penetratingly at them both. She spent the afternoons leaning over the half-empty fire muttering things they couldn't understand. She used to see visions in the fire, and sometimes Paul had to quieten her when she rose screaming that her sister was in it. When Maud spoke about her mother, her aunt became

painfully agitated, and told her to be quiet. She seemed to be losing her senses. She laid things down and forgot where she put them. She offered Maud heaps of money, laying it on the bed. Coins were often found stuffed under the pillows. Maud wrote to Paul that Aunt Pilking's generosity was quite extraordinary, and that she now knew the reason of the dear old creature's avarice before. It was to lay up a dowry for Maud.

Aunt Pilking used to scan her anxiously, and felt her hair. She began to comb it carefully, and became terrified that it was falling away.

"Eh!" she said to herself, "who'd a thought a drop would do it!"

She washed Maud's hair with a lotion to renew it. In all her letters to Paul, Maud said she was getting better every day, which was not true. It was only at the moment the poison had ceased that for a short time she seemed to be recovering. But all her system had become too soaked in it. Her nerves began to move apart from the control of her will. The fibres kept twitching, especially in her face and her feet. She felt as if creeping things were moving all over her. When she complained to her aunt and asked for a doctor, Miss Pilking shook with fear.

"A doctor? Eh! lass, ye didn't want a doctor before."

Maud said she was getting worse and worse, and would like to see Dr. Muster, unknown to Paul,

before Paul came back. When she insisted, Aunt Pilking began to call her bitter names again. She urged her to think of her approaching marriage. That was the best medicine.

"I . . . I can't," said Maud, seeking breath, and with a strange, blue twinge appearing for the first time about her cheeks.

"Get well!" said Miss Pilking, impatiently.

"Let me see a mirror, aunt?" asked Maud.

"Nay, lass," replied Miss Pilking, "get to sleep." But that was precisely what Maud never could do.

"I am . . . choking," she cried in the middle of the night.

"Eh!" said Miss Pilking, running out of the room. "Are ye trying to frighten *me*?"

Maud knew that if she was to get well before Paul came back she would require to see a doctor at once. But she was too weak to rise out of her bed, and Miss Pilking refused to bring one.

"We're beggars," said Miss Pilking, "and can't afford it."

"Beggars!" exclaimed Maud, "and you've been so kind to me. Here's money—plenty!"

But Miss Pilking told her to be a good lass, and only get to sleep. Maud knew that she was wasting away, and that she was losing her beauty hour by hour. She had asked for a mirror, but almost felt afraid to look into it, and never asked it again. She lay shivering in bed, praying to get better and for Paul's success.

Miss Pilking was startled when she received a note from Bristol ordering her to The Rookery. Her first inclination was to jump into Ludd. For more than an hour she sat wringing her hands before Maud and praying to be forgiven. Maud was worse than usual that day, and lay with her face almost black on the pillows. She followed with difficulty the wails and gestures of her aunt, but she always heard the word "forgiven."

"For what, aunt?" she asked.

"Eh, lass!" said Miss Pilking.

"Where are you going?" asked Maud, growing alarmed at her aunt's strange gestures.

"To *him*!" said Miss Pilking, falling back in a heap on the chair.

Maud thought she had collapsed, and rose to help her. But she indicated, by a movement of her skinny hands, which kept moving rapidly on the arms of the chair, that she was to be left alone.

"I . . . am quite well!" she said, aghast, and looked at Maud.

At length the old woman struggled out of the chair, and went for her bonnet and winter cloak, telling Maud to be a good girl and lie quiet.

"Where are you going, aunt?" asked Maud. "Don't leave me!"

"Eh, lass!" gasped Miss Pilking, lifting her stick and shaking it at an imaginary enemy. "*He's* a danger!"

Maud thought she had received bad news from Paul, and asked excitedly to see the letter.

"No, lass; it's not from your braw lad," said Miss Pilking, hurrying out.

She had gathered her last jewels and trinkets, and was carrying them in a bag along the road. It was cold and raw as she went along the lake shaking her head. The November rains had been gathered up into frost dust and hoar dust. The ruts and frozen puddles were slippery. Not a bird was singing, and the sky was more green than blue, with snow clouds topping the mountains. Miss Pilking took the road stiffly. Her rheumatism made her limp, and she went zigzag. She stumbled many a time and fell. "Och, hoch!" she said, and she rose only to fall again. Sometimes she sat in the middle of the road and undid her bonnet strings because she was warm with exertion. "Och, hoch!" she said as she rose again to proceed further.

Bristol was awaiting her with all her money-boxes ranged before him. He was counting their contents, and had discovered seven thousand four hundred and thirteen pounds besides unused drafts and bills. There were jewels besides, and three gold watches. Bristol opened one of the watches, and saw written on the inner side of the case: "Maria Whipper. From Her Husband." Attached to the chain was a pink ribbon with an ivory card at the end. On the card was written in a woman's hand, "This watch is for Maudy." Bristol put the watch back again, and waited at the window impatiently for Miss Pilking. Presently he heard footsteps in the avenue, and then saw Miss

Pilking coming up in company with Dr. Muster. She had met Dr. Muster at the gate. They had both passed it, but had returned on their steps. She accosted Dr. Muster.

"Ah, Miss . . . Miss Pil——," said Dr. Muster, searching for her name; "how do you do? . . . I hear your niece is very ill . . . such cold!"

"No," said Pilking, with vehemence, "she's not ill."

"Are you going in here?" asked Dr. Muster, holding on by one of the posts of the gate, and taking breath. His nose was blue with the cold. He looked as if he hadn't been shaved for three days. He had brown woollen mittens on his fingers, and shabby cloth gaiters over his boots.

"Are you going in?" he asked again, while Miss Pilking turned her back.

"I suppose so," said Miss Pilking, and they went up together.

"We are both, my good woman," said Dr. Muster, taking her hand, "both very near the grave."

"Eh, what d'ye say?" asked Miss Pilking, starting aside. "No indeed, sir, hey! we'll go a-maying yet."

"You are, heh! fond of pleasantry, my good lady," said Dr. Muster, looking round in the bleak November weather. "We are near our end."

"Never say that!" said Miss Pilking, advancing with him, while they both leant heavily on their sticks, and simultaneously shook their heads.

"Miss Pilking come in, Dr. Muster remain outside," cried a voice which made them both come to a halt at once.

"You first," said Miss Pilking, urging him to go.

"No, no," replied Dr. Muster, as he sat on a garden-seat covered with hoar frost; "ladies first."

Miss Pilking went in, but came out again very shortly. Bristol meant only to tell her to take all her money away, and to trouble him no more.

"What is it, sir?" she asked as she hobbled in.

"Miss Pilking," he said and pointed to the boxes, "what are these? I am not a banker, take them to Brind."

"Oh, sir!" said Miss Pilking, wringing her hands and guessing that he was going to hand her over to the police sergeant at last, "they're all for you, and here's more."

She offered him the bag she had brought, but she knew by his look that she was making him angry.

"Sit down," he said as he began to count the money. "I have nothing to do with you—why did you bring all this here?"

"It's just——" she said, searching for words.

He was unwilling to question her too much, but looked very penetratingly at her.

"You're a danger!" she said, moving off.

Bristol was anxious to question her about her niece, but something prevented him.

"Are you mad?" he said.

"Keep it . . . keep it all," she appealed; "though I'll be in 'e poorhouse, let me die in peace."

"And your——?" He wished to say "and your niece?" but couldn't finish.

When she persisted in offering the money he told her by a look to hold her tongue.

"Is it correct?" he asked, after he had counted everything, and laid out the jewels hurriedly.

"Yes," she said; "keep them."

He opened his window and threw the boxes out, startling Dr. Muster, who was sitting near.

"You're a good fellow," she said in a last appeal, and laughing at the back of her throat.

"Take them away, I tell you," he said.

"My donkey 'bus is sold," replied Miss Pilking, shrivelling with fear.

"I'll send a cart," he said. "Go!"

She went, curtseying, still holding out the last bag to him.

"Och, hoch!" she said, as she went down the avenue without looking at Dr. Muster. "Is this the end o' 't?"

Dr. Muster sat patiently waiting to be called, but Bristol was pacing his room. He wished to know if the report that Maud was ill was true. But then she might be ill like anybody else, he said. Yet he looked anxiously down the avenue, and watched Miss Pilking passing out. We are all going to be entangled! he said. He was annoyed

that his brain seemed bent on discovering some connection between himself and Miss Pilking. He should have handed her over long ago. He remembered that his plan of studying her crime had been all upset by Jessie. He had said he would take care of Maud and Paul. Who knows, he asked himself, what that old wretch has done? And the bottle? He had had the bottle himself . . . yet it was too monstrous to suppose that he was going to be embroiled in a thing like this. He turned abruptly in his walk through the room, and went to the window again. Dr. Muster was still sitting on the garden-seat with his head drooping. He was rubbing his feet together for the cold. Bristol knocked on the window and beckoned to him. The old man staggered up to the door and came in benumbed.

"Ah, doctor, doctor," said Bristol, as he hesitated at the door, asking permission. He looked like the phantom of himself.

"Come in only—come in," said Bristol, as Dr. Muster still waited.

"You are . . . very kind," babbled the old man, looking eagerly through the room, and hoping that his ears were not deceiving him in making the tone of Bristol's voice appear tenderer than it used to be.

"Have you come for money?" said Bristol.

Dr. Muster retreated a step, but Bristol rallied him by taking him by the shoulder.

"What are you frightened for—eh?" asked Bristol sharply.

"Of *you*, sir!" replied the old man. "I . . . I will go away rather if it is not convenient."

"Sit down," said Bristol. "My good dotard, what do you want?"

"My poor wife is . . . is very ill—really *ill* this time," he said; "and we have nothing to keep us warm except the cat, which I . . . put on her bosom!"

"Yes, yes," said Bristol; "it's cold, come near the fire."

"You are too good," replied the doctor.

"Ah, doctor, doctor, keep up your heart," said Bristol. "Do you remember that day you came here to tell me everything? Have I not been true to you? I have said nothing to any one."

"Oh, oh," exclaimed Dr. Muster, "have I done anything to displease you or make you change towards me?"

"Nothing," said Bristol, "and you're going to get all your money back to-day."

Dr. Muster looked up eagerly as if trying to comprehend the words.

"First," said Bristol, taking a bag out of his cabinet, "here's the subscription. Let me count it."

He counted it, and asked if the sum was correct. Dr. Muster said it was.

"You are too considerate of me," whispered the old man, in a tone that meant still distrust of this

sudden change. "Are you going to abandon me? No, sir—no, do purge me still."

He put his hand into the bag, which was opened and shut by a drawing tape at the top, and drew out four sovereigns.

"I have need only of these," he said, and handed back the bag.

But Bristol clapped him again on the shoulder, and told him to take the bag away.

"You have had a curious life, doctor. How did you feel all these years?"

A perturbed look passed across Dr. Muster's face as he prepared to reply.

"I felt miserable," he said. "I am much indebted to you, sir."

"We are all alike, you know," said Bristol. "Vice is as natural to us as virtue. We are like linen, always needing to be washed. You only wickedly rejoiced."

Dr. Muster rose as if his arraignment was beginning again, and handed back the bag with a shaking hand.

"Bother you!" said Bristol, laughing. "Have done with this, man—take it all. What have I to do with you?"

Dr. Muster sat down again in an expectant attitude.

"I was saying we are all alike," said Bristol. "Don't you think, doctor, that our criminal code, for instance, is not half psychological enough? I

would like to see some more biology, even zoology, in your law. Suppose, now, an aunt murders her niece. It is enough for law if the fact is discovered. The aunt is taken and hanged. Is this enough for science? I say no, doctor. The most important evidence is always the evidence of medical experts who discover predisposing causes. Law believes in freewill. Law is too theological, too little biological. Ah, doctor, we are all alike, and are about as free as the east wind."

Dr. Muster looked up again inquiringly. He had not heard words like these for many a day. The fire was cheering and warming him, and even a faint smile was breaking over his face. But he was trying to discover whether it was all a dream. He kept hugging the bag of money, and jingling it by turns. Bristol brought out of a press all Dr. Muster's money.

"Here's all your money, old man," he said. "I'll count it out."

"Oh, oh, why?" said Dr. Muster, with a senile smile. "Keep it all. I have no need of it. I am rich," and he jingled the bag again.

"Look you," said Bristol, "I have given you interest on it all for six months at five per cent."

"A most scrupulous man!" said Dr. Muster, nodding his head, and looking into the fire.

"Read over the amounts with me," said Bristol.

Dr. Muster adjusted his eyeglass, and looked

strangely into the books, where he recognised the inventory of his property.

"Is it correct?" asked Bristol.

"Everything," said Dr. Muster, and burst into tears, hugging the books and seizing the papers. "Fifteen thousand pounds with the interest. You are too, too——"

He couldn't get further, and sat back with his hands on the books. "But what is to happen?" he asked, timidly.

"To happen? why, nothing," replied Bristol. And he laughed good-naturedly, as if the grim joke were now at an end.

Dr. Muster shook his head as if in fear and disbelief, and Bristol could not persuade him.

"No," said Dr. Muster, with a vacant, ghost-like look, and feeling his pulse, "it's too late, and I'm very near the grave."

"Nonsense!" said Bristol. "Goodbye, doctor; I'll send these chests to you. How's . . . Widow Busk?"

Dr. Muster was already in the avenue, and turned quickly round again at the word Busk. But Bristol had shut his door, and the old man tottered down in a bewilderment of fear and hope and surprise.

Bristol sat in his study all afternoon. A certain misgiving and unrest had taken possession of him, and the thought of the near future became haunting. He tried to disabuse himself of the notion of responsibility for anything that might have oc-

curred. And yet a peculiar, slow, suppressed movement of suspicion crept through him, the way a pain creeps along a nerve. He kept repeating in spite of himself, We are all going to be entangled! Bah! he said, conscience, that poor clucking hen, sits on eggs not her own for ever in the brain nest, too eager to hatch, and then discovers . . . Pfui! I have seen all the world . . . hollow, hollow! And yet, he went on, it was only after Macbeth committed the murder that Shakespeare makes him say, "Life is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Is it something criminal in us that makes the world nauseous? He roused himself, saying something would have to be done immediately. He had finished off with Dr. Muster. He persuaded himself finally that he had finished off with Miss . . . He could hardly pronounce the abominable name . . . There remained Jessie and Paul and Lord Sother.

Jessie was the centre of all the trouble, and he thought of the serene life he had led before he knew her. It was through her that his divagation had been caused, and all his plans upset. His life was to have been dispassionate, a long and patient study of the misery and repentance of mankind. But now he knew misery and repentance himself. He was going to have looked at crime from the outside, but the thought suddenly seized him that he was now sitting in the midst of it. As for Jessie, he hated her, and even found in her no delight any

more. Fan *might* bring him peace of a sort! He would travel with Fan, put his father in safe hands, and never see Great Pines any more. But how? . . .

One half of the dilemma was caused precisely by Fan. Mother Rachel, repenting of her diatribes against him, was busily informing Mrs. Crippen and the rest that the marriage was now settled. He had been shy all the time, continued Mother Rachel, and had declared himself only the other day. And when Mrs. Crippen remarked that Bristol was secretly married to Jessie, Mother Rachel called her an impudent hussy, and left indignant. Bristol knew what the talk was. It was true that since the night Seer Mossman had called them both his "children," Fan had asked many a kiss. He really found some relief by her side. But when he was alone, Ach! he said, that other mad moment!

It was getting dark, and he looked up to his rows of books again. Perhaps, he thought, your immobile philosophers and other serene persons may be full of dead blood? Do they not see that the universe exists to create sensation of some sort? It is what every living thing desires. We are turned out of one sensation into another. Is it youth? . . .

"Marriage!" he had said to Jessie, when she became appalled at his indifference. "Love has no clocks. If he counts time, he does it by a cunning dial of your faces, as you prettily said in your poem."

There was no more allurements in his talk. Like all women, she feared a man who, if he ever gave way to a passion, grew cold over it, and made it an object of study and research. It was only now she saw that for weeks he had been subjecting both himself and her to a sort of spiritual vivisection. If she tried to win him by flattery he only remarked that it was a singular rouge-pot. Everything she said or did became matter for dispassionate criticism. She tried him with tears. But he merely took up a tear-bottle which he kept on his desk, and that he said he had found at Carthage. Almost humorous, he said, as he held it up; all the chemistry of spiritual existence may be concentrated here. Might as well be called a joy-bottle, since men are made so strangely that they use tears also as the sign of their gladness when it is great. We weep when we are sorry; we weep when we are glad. Chlorate of tears, then, in which I find grief like a precipitate and joy acting like a good reagent!

If he could have given her one word, one little word, sweet like the smell of briar bushes after rain! But he could give her no word, and she sat trembling in her room. "Love is done with us," he said, "and paid only a flying visit."

He rose to light his lamp, but first stood looking into the desolate garden where the sun was tingeing bare tree-tops. He saw Jessie walking in the garden. He saw her gestures. He knew gesture. For weeks she had been sitting in terror in his house,

and she had gone out to mingle her desolation with the night's. Was it remorse turning histrionic? The haggard trees were crimson gilt in the sun-down, and there was now a wonderful light, a wonderful sort of supernatural light, in the empty garden.

She seemed to be mingling and struggling in their red fire-dance with the Seven Deadly Sins. Bristol became paler, and strained his eyes to where the trees darkened the garden. She might be thinking of suicide, which is like a strange latch-key left hanging carelessly at Death's old gate. He turned still paler.

"O me!" she was saying. She was going down the avenue to the old ivy tower at the main gate. Was she going to Ludd? To her brother? Her brother is away. Fan may be looking on. He unfastened the window, and his mouth was opening to call her by her name when he saw her coming up again, twisting her arms and hands. "Oh . . . I . . . I . . ." she cried. How could she love him? He had pillaged the secret places of her soul. . . . How could she hate him? . . . The first time she saw him she was wonder-wounded. She had been sitting too long at the feet of his phantasy. And she was trying hard—how vainly!—to clamber back, up to some beckoning spirits and heights. How, in spite of much apedom, they do lift their heads, not menacingly, but in a vast appeal! There were now so few doors of escape. There was none. Her

laughter in June, it was coming back to her in a jeer. Love's Rosary, Beauty's, it was lying as roses in November may!

"Oh, oh! if I had a mother—anybody to love me and *hide* me!" she cried.

She was coming up towards the window, and Bristol felt a sort of irresistible fascination in watching her. He saw all her body taking part in her gesture. "Must I live with this woman!" he said.

Her great tresses were shining in the sun. He beckoned to her, and then came running out, while she screamed.

"Ach!" he said, as he seized her and drew her violently in, feeling as if his hands were already in the blood and smoke of great crime.

CHAPTER II

GOES IN SEARCH OF SILLY SHEEP

EVERY one in Great Pines and in Little Pines was doing his best to keep warm. There had never been such cold, and there were proposals even already to go skating on Loch Ludd. When Paul Ring comes back he will find every one driving in sledges, perhaps. Meantime the field labourers, to whom winter brings misery, were standing on the ice threshold of it wondering what horror was in store. If their stock of coal and peat runs down the worse for them. All the peat land is deep under ice. The sun had long been hidden, and the landscape lay cloud-wrapped and snow-wrapped.

Ludd had once been frozen over, but it was thirty years ago. Many of the inhabitants remembered the rash things that had been done. All Great Pines and Little Pines went to curl, it was said, and some foolhardy young men had driven over the loch in their sleighs. The religious sense of Great Pines condemned it as a temptation of Providence. Ludd is not broad, but perilously deep. There had been great fun and many a spill. To avoid the long

roads heaped with snow which circled Ludd and joined Great Pines and Little with neighbouring townships, the bakers and vendors used to wheel their barrows straight across the loch. The young men became bolder and bolder, even when the thaw wind warned them to desist in their audacity. But while the ice spell lasted little risk was run. Only the old women refused to step on the slippery floor, although, indeed, now and again an aged grandmother might have been seen getting piloted across. Well, it looked as if there was going to be a repetition of such a winter carnival, and the boys were already preparing lanterns for illumination at night.

They had driven in poles, which were already hard frozen at the base, and they hung their lanterns on them. The frost had set in as early as it had done in that memorable year. It was preceded by a great storm of snow. Great Pines knew nothing of the snow-plough or was too idle to employ it; so that the roads were covered with heaped drifts. The snow brought its silence with it, and there were no sounds except of its own feline steps. Solitary vehicles and brave walkers did their best to stagger through the heaps. It was a matter of walking waist-deep, in some places chin-deep. The road between Great Pines and Little was reported impassable, and during these days Bristol saw almost nothing of Miss Pilking. People were remaining snug in their houses, and invalids like Maud were almost envied the excuse for staying abed.

Yet Lord Sother ventured out, for he had heard that the sheep were perishing, and he made one of a rescue party. Numbers of them had come down seeking food, but hundreds were missing, and were doubtless starving if not already snow-choked on the moors. The shepherds went up in a body, and Lord Sother with them, eager to lend a hand. He took his hound Byng, and made the party merry. It was proposed to drive the sheep down to the pen, as a common centre. But the pen was nowhere discoverable, buried wall deep. They had to content themselves with carrying home stray foundlings. "Peh! peh! Byng, is't ready?" he said as the dog plunged in front of him into the snow. His lordship carried two large brandy flasks slung over his shoulders, and before the party had mounted half way he called a halt for a serve round. It seemed scarcely necessary, because, in spite of the cold, warmth came with climbing, and one might on that account catch a chill at the top. But his lordship was inexorable, and the men stopped with good enough cheer, to be sure. There was a great following of dogs, all jealous of Byng, who looked disdain on that mutton police.

"Heh, lads!" said his lordship, "make warm in such a freeze."

It hardly looked like a death freeze, for the sweat was standing on his lordship's brow. And his lordship was so careless as to remove his hat to enjoy the chill air.

"Hey! in my young days they used to talk 'bout

leaving ninety-nine in the wilderness and going to look for any shorthorn or blackface that had got stuck. Peh! that's what we're doing to-day. Houp, lads! "

His lordship was a mighty favourite in the district with the shepherds and the boys. He spent money freely while it lasted, but he had now no more than fifteen shillings in his pocket. Bristol had waved him off, and he was meditating another appeal to Brind. His money went because he gratified every sentimentality. He was once at the lake shore where the fishers come in. Sometimes the trout were still living in the pools at the bottom of the boats. Lord Sother used to bargain for their life, to the amusement of the boys, buy them off at a sixpence apiece, and send them swimming freely away again. He used to be beset by roguish fellows carrying gasping, half-dead fish. If a trout turned out to be "used up" after it was thrown back to his native element his lordship got back his sixpence, and used to laugh as heartily over it all as the "kids." In spite of his eccentricities, he was everywhere welcome. It was always "hail fellow, well met!" with him.

"And what the devil if he takes a sup?" the shepherds said. "Deserves it, the old hearty!"

His lordship gave the word of command to advance, and they all followed him, because he showed some skill as a shepherd. The wind hit them like wet towels on bare skin. The old lord's hands were

blue, and his face very blue: although, perhaps, the wind shouldn't be held responsible for all the high colour. But it was true that he was chittering and shivering and sweating at the same time. He ought to put on his hat.

"This way, boys! A poor thing frozen and stark. S'death! No use lifting *him*. Back, Byng!"

His lordship stooped down and removed the snow, but when he discovered the beast rigid, he whistled Byng to go on again. His lordship was an admirer of modern poetry, and had got a suggestion—

"‘Let us begin and carry up this corpse,’ he sang out,
“‘Singing together—What is it, eh?’”

The shepherds thought his lordship had become suddenly inspired, and some of them, so excellent had been his lordship's brandy, were feeling inspired themselves.

"Ay, lo'ship!" they cried.

"What is it, lads?"

"‘Thither our path lies. Wind we up the heights,
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life's the level's and the night's—
He's for the morning.’”

"Ah, our low life! Who's for the morning?
Not . . . not *me*!"

In spite of his grossness a certain melancholy and romance lingered in him. He loved poetry and a

good hymn. His heart was generous, and although he had lived wildly, he had never done a cruel thing. He used to look back with a certain regret on the early days when he was in orders. He said he was an old blackguard for having forsaken them. It was too late now, and he used to say that religion in its first dreamlike purity from self-interest, forsakes us, like poetry, after youth.

“Cheer’ly, lo’ship!” the men cried.

His lordship staggered up well, and his powers of endurance, at an age like his, were admired by all the party. They came upon a remnant flock sunk in the snow, and too feeble to rise out of it. The old lord went among them, rubbing their faces and stuffing brandy down their throats.

“See the spring lambs!”

Byng refused every order except what came from his master.

“Steady, lo’ship!” cried the men, as his lordship climbed to a point where he had seen the snow moving as if a live beast lay beneath.

The glen resounded with the shepherds’ cries and the barking of the dogs. Some stray sheep had heard them, and came stumbling over the waste places.

“To work, Byng!” cried his lordship. “Steady, steady!”

Byng did wonderfully well as an improvised sheep-dog. His lordship was returning with his rescued sheep on his shoulder, and staggering as he

came down. The shepherds wished to relieve him.

"Pey! pey! My lads, I'm not Sother if 't'll cry in vain. Is't cold, my beastie? Don't believe us. We're not Samaritans, we! We're going to eat you likely at Christmas!"

Byng followed half approvingly, but occasionally leapt up for a caress as well.

"Down, Byng! down, boy! At my feet all night, sir, and look at this!"

Byng followed ashamed. The snow was coming on again, and Lord Sother said he would go down with the half-frozen sheep. The shepherds were to follow with the rescued flocks.

"Houp, lads!" he called to them through the blinding snow mists.

"Cheer'ly, lo'ship!" they shouted back to him.

"Is't cold?" he kept saying to the sheep as he descended. The paths were stony and rocky, and the snows deceptive. Lord Sother slipped and fell on his back, while the sheep rolled over him. But the snow padded the sharp stones, and the fall was not severe. The old lord rose stunned, however, while Byng snuffed about him.

"Eh! eh! blackguard *facilis descensus*—what did they use to say at college?"

He put the beast on his shoulder again, and came down more carefully, though he was giddy.

"Cheer'ly, lo'ship!" he heard the men still on the heights.

Great Pines was astonished to see him with a sheep on his shoulder, and came out to cheer him.

"He's alive, he is!" said his lordship to the children that opened their windows, and clapped their hands.

Janet was likewise surprised, and objected to the order that the sheep was to be entertained in the kitchen.

"'Deed, lo'ship, a beast like that on mi floor!"

"But I say, yea, mademoiselle, and you'll give him soup and anything he asks, my hussy!"

"Ya," said Janet, as his lordship went off, shaking the snow from his boots, "I muss say't. Lo'ship's a 'eart, I'll be bound."

But Janet was going to have more than one invalid to nurse. In two days lordship had a quinsy, and in a week the signs of a pleurisy. Lady Sother remained in her apartments, and it was in vain that Janet pointed out the need of a nurse. "Ye might hear his cough," said Janet. But ladyship had permanently given herself up to serious meditation, and considered Janet's interruptions as evidence of the wiles of Satan meant to lure her back to the world and his lordship's follies. "I wish I were a nun," she said. When Janet became loud in her representations of the gravity of the case she was rebuked with some sternness. "'Deed," said she, in obstinate protest, "can *I* attend 'm? I'm no marrit, and it's a everlasting scan'al what I've to do for 'e poor lordie! He's dyin'! Here's a season!"

"It will be well for him," replied Lady Sother, handing Janet a tract, "if he is thinking of his end. When the wheel is broken at the cistern——"

"Ay!" broke in Janet, "it's *broken* at the cistern, and the pipes is burst with this frost, but yer la'ship's got other things to do, 't seems, and *I'm* left to attend to 'em while lo'ship's shivering and cryin' for hot water in 's bed!"

"Depart, woman!" said Lady Sother out of the semi-darkness of her penitentiary. So that Janet was left to her own skill in managing burst pipes and his sinking lordship.

"Mademoiselle," says he, "where is her ladyship? . . . I'm ill!"

"'Deed, and ye're ill, lordie, and she suld be ashamed o' 'erself. She's a-fastin' and a-kneec-bending, but it 'ud be christianer like if she'd change the sheets and feel yer polses! But I'll bring old Muster 'long."

"Ask Mrs. Crippen," said his lordship, sinking among his pillows.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Janet, "that painty Crippen. Here's a house!"

At anyrate it was time that Lord Sother had a competent nurse, and it is to Janet's credit that she summoned Mrs. Crippen at once, since ladyship remained deaf to any appeals. It is also to Mrs. Crippen's credit that she came, though it was not true, as Mother Rachel and others said, that she ran with unseemly haste to his lordship's bedside.

"I'll go straight to the dying man in spite o' ye all," she said. "I know the part o' a tendered-hearted woman, I hope." Lady Emma was apprised of her arrival, and Janet hoped that out of shame she would begin to see her right position. But her ladyship told Janet to depart and take her portion with the wicked.

Mrs. Crippen's visits cheered the old lord.

"How d'ye do, sweet Mrs. Crippen?"

Mrs. Crippen sat at his bedside and made gruel, which his lordship took without a murmur, and even praised for its excellence. But when the dose was renewed, he suggested something stronger—toddy, for instance.

"I'll get your lordship old Muster," said Mrs. Crippen, "though I wouldn't have him for myself. They say he's skill."

"It's just a quinsy," wheezed the old lord.

"La!" said Janet, who was jealous of Mrs. Crippen, "it's all 'cause 'o that sickly beast in 'e kitchen. Lo'ship carried it down, and it's, hey day! makin' a floor for me!"

His lordship rose during a fit of coughing, and then fell back, while Mrs. Crippen adjusted the pillows; Byng lay watching at the foot of the bed.

"You'll send for Muster?" asked the old lord, holding his chest. "Lady Emma speaks of taking the veil. I . . . I may be going to take it myself!"

Mrs. Crippen caught his meaning, and shed tears.

"Nay, look ye, sweet Mrs. Crippen——"

"Oh!" said she.

"Nay, look ye, there's no knowing. Death's an old dust-man, and may come along any day."

"What's lo'ship saying about the dust-cart?" asked Janet.

But Mrs. Crippen waved her off, and told her not to speak so loud.

"I will watch him. You can go," she said.

Janet called her an impudent slut under her breath, and went to warn Lady Emma that the enemy was within the gate. But she found Lady Emma burning old letters. "I say, Baxter, you may destroy that heap; they're from Lord Fiddle, and I'm sure it doesn't matter a fiddlestick now. D'ye know what men are?" Janet said she didn't, but asked to keep the gold-linked cord that tied them.

"Yes, yes; it's the man's hair. It must be white by this time, anyway!"

Janet burned off the hair and kept the links, besides many ribbons and trinkets which had romantic histories.

"Take them," said her ladyship. "There's no holy living in *their* company. And here are some threatening letters from Lady Fiddle tied with catgut—hah! hah! I wonder what I put catgut round them for? To be sure, because she was an old fiddle-string—heh! heh!"

Baxter had no use for catgut, but it was not in

her nature to resist a perusal of the letters, and she used to pore over them before committing them to the flames.

Mrs. Crippen once knocked at Lady Emma's door with the intention of informing her ladyship how ill her brother was turning. But when Lady Emma opened and discovered who it was she exclaimed "Babylon!" and shut her door.

The old lord was now in a high fever, and it was necessary to see Dr. Muster at once. He lay, perhaps for the first time, genuinely tormented by the thought of his embarrassments. He was no longer able to go to Bristol, and there was no question of asking Bristol to come to him. But he had heard that the loan which he had to pay was Paul's, and he wished to know the truth. He remembered the day Paul had come demanding money, and the truth began to dawn on him only now. He was anxious about Paul, and began to speak to Mrs. Crippen.

Mrs. Crippen shook her head in bewilderment. "Ye'd better see Crack," said she.

Crack indeed would have gladly come, because he was beginning to think that the Badcock estate was going to be a hoax after all. He became exasperated, and guessed that he had made a mistake in not siding with Paul from the first. He was eagerly waiting for the boy's return.

"Lookie here, Brind," he said. "There's some 'at in 'e wind again, and I admit I've done a green thing in not siding with the heir. The best of us

makes mistakes, eh? But wait a bit! There's going to be some'at o' a fling."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Brind, who had never even mentioned that he had himself taken the side of the heir.

But Lord Sother would not agree to see Crack, and when Mrs. Crippen suggested Brind he shook his head.

"These gamekeepers, ma'am!" he said.

He was anxious to make restitution to Paul. He began to ask for Paul, but was told that he was away. It was not easy to see how the money could be quickly paid up, if it was ever paid up at all.

"I . . . I say I am very ill, am I not?" he said, looking round. "Is the doctor here?"

Dr. Muster was standing in the room, thankful to have at last something to do, even though doubtful as to the safety of his fee. His good fortune had come too suddenly back to him, and he and Widow Busk were anxiously trying to discover Bristol's motive. They did not mean to change the way of living that had been imposed on them. Indeed, as he counted out his money before his wife, while a vacant smile lit up his face, Dr. Muster felt that he had now little use for it. The time of repentance and purgation had lasted too long. Besides, he could not know what moment the caprice of his tormentor might change. Any day it might all be asked back.

"Let us live miserly with it," he said; "who

knows what may yet happen? And yet who could say we have done great wrong?"

"You loved me," said Widow Busk, comforting him. "That was all, and you wished Busk to die, which he did. You never yet told me how you gave that secret away."

"You don't know him," said Dr. Muster, shaking his head. "Let us hope."

Dr. Muster, indeed, doubted whether he should begin his work again without Bristol's knowledge, and he came timidly to Lord Sother's bedside. It was not known at The Rookery that his lordship was ill, else Bristol might have prevented Dr. Muster's attendance. The snow had choked up gossip, besides many another thing these early days of December.

"Am I ill?" asked the old lord.

Dr. Muster put on his eyeglass in his wonted manner, and sat thoughtfully at the bedside with his finger on Lord Sother's pulse.

"Your lordship is ill," he said, "and must remain quiet."

"I can't," said Sother, rising. "You are a guardian to Paul Ring, I'm told."

Dr. Muster started.

"Yes . . . yes, I am," he said, wondering at the question.

"You and Bristol," said Lord Sother.

"Yes," said Dr. Muster, with more foreboding; "but be quiet and don't think of things like these. What are they to you?"

"I must pay back the boy's loan," said Lord Sother.

"The boy's loan!" repeated Dr. Muster, "I . . . I never heard of it."

Lord Sother explained that a large sum had been lent him at heavy interest out of the Badcock estate. Whew! A light was breaking on Dr. Muster, but it was a doubtful light. Was it possible that Bristol had been speculating with the Rings' money? He hoped so. He made room easily enough in his old empty heart for any news that incriminated Bristol. Meantime he questioned Lord Sother, and promised to look after the affair. He went home to Widow Busk eager with the news, and turned up a law book to discover the delinquency of Bristol.

"The tutor," he read, "is not at liberty to speculate with the funds of his pupil, however tempting the venture may be, or however insignificant the apparent risk." Yet Bristol might be able to defend himself after all. They both wrought with the piece of news as if it were a half-dangerous, half-delightful thing, pawing at it like dogs with a hedgehog. They turned it over and over and felt its prickles, and decided that, like a hedgehog, it, too, had a vulnerable point. Yet it was an uncanny thing. Dr. Muster could not go immediately and challenge Bristol. He must be extremely wary. Feeble as he now was, his experience during the last six months had slightly sharpened his wits in a way they had never been sharpened before. Some

bring so perilously late to life's old grindstone the knives and weapons of their spiritual armoury: yet it keeps turning, turning, and will grind at your own time whatever you bring to it—yourself, for instance.

"Oh, if I could crush that man," said Dr. Muster to his wife.

"Leave him, say nothing," wisely replied Widow Busk.

"I would like to see Paul," said his lordship. "I must see him, I can't die cheating that boy. Am I very ill! Tell me the truth, man."

"Yes," said Dr. Muster, thinking about other things.

"I must see the boy," said the old lord in genuine grief; I would like to see him—do you hear!"

"And . . . and so would I!" answered Dr. Muster.

At first he was bewildered, and hardly recognised the strategic value to himself of Bristol's abuse of Paul's confidence. But he began to see that whatever there was to do must be done quickly. Lord Sother was rapidly sinking. It was a simple pleurisy developing into complete disease, because of the old lord's age and life-long intemperance.

"It is a strange time, my dear," said Dr. Muster to his wife, "we must contrive to see Paul. These moments are precious, I do feel."

"Dr. Muster went to Miss Pilking's and knocked

hastily at her door. Miss Pilking opened it wide enough only to let a hand pass between, and peered out.

"Eh? what are ye wanting?" she cried when she saw Dr. Muster. "Nobody told ye to come; we're all well."

"When will Paul be home?" asked Dr. Muster, eagerly. "Is he here?"

"No," said Miss Pilking, "in a fortnight . . . I don't know when," and quickly shut her door.

Dr. Muster went away disappointed.

Lord Sother would be dead in less than a fortnight. Dr. Muster had much to think of, and proposed to write to Paul urging him to come back. But he was in the midst of his examination, and the proposal seemed useless. Dr. Muster had heard of Maud's illness and Miss Pilking's embarrassments. He knew that Bristol had prevented Paul's marriage, and his slow brain asked itself if, since Bristol had wronged the boy in the matter of this irrecoverable loan, he might not also have wronged him in the attempted frustration of his marriage. And (oh, irony of our complex motives!) he hoped and hoped to prove Bristol incriminated, not once or twice, but over and over. It required so much to make the scales even between them. Did Bristol look honest? Dr. Muster's imagination began to discover all sorts of wicked possibilities for the "scrupulous man." But he knew how wary he would have to be. Perhaps his own interests were

bound up with Bristol's safety. It would be better to make a pact with him for mutual defence, would it? If, after all, there was nothing but this to be charged against Bristol, it would be secure of easy pardon.

In the midst of these heart searchings Lord Sother died, before Paul returned. Dr. Muster had at anyrate worked this case "hard," with a strong personal interest in the old lord's recovery, but with no result. One day he was summoned hastily, and came in as his patient was sinking. To the end Lord Sother had spoken of Paul, and at the last moments seemed to suppose that he was in the room.

"My dear . . . boyie," he said, trying to look up, "I owe you . . . mon-ey!"

Dr. Muster remained to hold his head, while Janet and Mrs. Crippen stood at the foot of the bed. Lady Emma came running in, at last persuaded of the reality.

"Edmond!"

"I . . . s-s-say," struggled the sinking man, "I did . . . not know it was yours. . . . Beware of that man!"

"Beware of that man!" ejaculated Dr. Muster in a whisper. "That man! Beware?"

Lord Sother was falling into unconsciousness, but Dr. Muster, who would have preferred to go, knowing that nothing could be done, remained to hear anything else.

"I . . . I've found my . . . my sheep which was lost!"

"La!" said Janet, in a burst of weeping, "he's crying for that beast!"

"Oh, Edmond!" said Lady Emma, turning to Mrs. Crippen. "He was once in orders in the Church of England, and that was his first text . . . I am glad he remembers it now."

"Wh . . . was lost!" repeated the old lord, with his eyes shut.

Dr. Muster took a feather steeped in brandy and touched the lips.

"Empty vat . . . va . . . at of my drunkenness," murmured the old lord, trying to look round — "*empty!*"

He sank amid the tears of the hysterical women.

"It's all hosannas with him now," cried Janet, as she turned to the window.

"Wonderful world!" ejaculated Dr. Muster, retreating.

CHAPTER III

GIVES AN ANTIDOTE FOR A POISON

A WEEK before Christmas Bristol was startled one night at twelve o'clock by a nervous rap at his door. He was leaning with his right elbow on his table, and his brows were knit as he looked steadily into the fire.

"Come in," he said, with a jump.

Miss Pilking came in, pale and hideous like a Phœnician statue.

"*You* again!" he said, as if forbidding her.

But she advanced shaking her skinny hand at him.

"Go away," he said; "you're a midnight hag."

"Och!" said she, sinking down in a seat near him and letting the ice and snow drip from her boots and skirt; "it's cold. Come at once!"

"What have I to do with you?" asked Bristol, pale.

"Ye said ye would help me," said Miss Pilking, shaking her finger at him.

"Help you—when?"

But she only shook her head and said he knew.

"Miss Pilking!" exclaimed Bristol.

"Ay, ay," she said.

"Go away."

"No, no," she replied. "Come with me. I didn't know a drop would do it. I only meant to take away some o' her good looks. Och, they're gone and she's going with 'em. You meant the same. What's to be done?"

She appeared to be no longer afraid of him, and sat smirking at the fire, breaking the silence now and again by reminding him it was time to rise.

"I'm going to bed," he said. "Leave my house—you're mad."

But she sat without listening, bobbing from side to side. She seemed to be falling asleep, worn out with the long night road she had come. She began to snore, but opened her eyes at intervals and asked him if he were not ready.

"Ye may save 'er before Christmas."

He could hardly believe his ears. Was it possible that his simulation of partnership with her the day he had first questioned her had instigated her to abominable crime? . . . Maud poisoned? . . . She seemed to have lost fear of him, and was quietly sleeping on the chair, shrivelled up in a heap. His feeling of disturbance was growing into one of alarm. He remembered that the day Miss Pilking had taken away the bottle which he caused her to surrender, the paper which was strapped to it had been left. He had not seen it since, or thought of

it. It might be in his cabinet, and he went to look. As he opened the drawers hastily the noise wakened her.

"Eh! What d'ye say?" she asked.

He found the paper, and saw it was a prescription. It was written as follows—

"Argen Nitratis gr. 24
Spt Aetheris Nitratis, 3 iiii
Aquæ ad 3 ii"

It broke off here, but there were jottings on the back.

"Eh!" exclaimed Miss Pilking, rising and shivering. "These poor silly fingers, look at them, if they're not sore!"

"Look at this," said Bristol, holding up the paper.

"Oh, oh my!" exclaimed Miss Pilking, hobbling up to him.

"Yes," said Bristol, "you remember? I have nothing to do with you; take this away."

She took the paper and put on her spectacles to read it. She looked like a hideous witch. Her nose and chin were almost meeting, and her face was seamed with deep lines. She looked over her glasses at Bristol. His eyes were fixed on her.

"Eh!" she exclaimed, "what are ye looking at?"

"At you," he said. "Where is the bottle and its contents?"

"It's deep in Ludd," she said.

He thought she said deep in Maud. He took

back the paper and read it again. He asked himself if he should hand her over immediately. But his knowledge of her prospective crime would implicate himself, and if it were proved that she was criminally insane, which he expected, his own responsibility would not be less. But he hesitated even to ask questions about Maud's condition, and hovered on the threshold of them. Miss Pilking's apparent callousness was the most disturbing feature of all. She was evidently supposing that because he had returned all her hush-money he was somehow on a level with herself. That had been his mistake, but looked at any way he felt that somehow the nets were tightening around himself.

It was almost one o'clock, and he had come to no decision. He thought he could easily deliver himself from the insane charge that he had anything to do with Maud's condition. He had only let time slip. The confusion into which he had been plunged had made him forget the danger of his experiments with Miss Pilking's confession. But a suggestion now came to him. Perhaps he might yet save Maud by discovering an antidote. It was true that he might thus be aggravating his own peculiar responsibility in the case, but it was at least human to deliver Maud from suffering.

"Come at once," he said. "How did you arrive here?"

"I walked," she said, lifting her soaked skirt. "Such a night!"

"I'll take the sleigh," he said. "Come out."

He put out his lamps, and as he opened the door a blast of snow fell into the hall. He had pulled on long boots, and buttoned up his fur coat.

"Och, hoch!" said Miss Pilking, as they went out.

"Hold your tongue!" he said, as he guided her to the stables.

He looked up to Jessie's room, where there was a light burning.

"So late!" he thought; "what is *she* at?"

He half turned to go back, but told Miss Pilking to remain at a corner of the avenue till he came down with the sleigh. Miss Pilking sat in the snow muttering words he couldn't understand. He came down in a few minutes with a one-horse sleigh, from which he had removed the bells to avoid noise. They were soon on the road, but it was hard work for the horse, because the way was blocked. The snow was falling incessantly and freezing as it fell.

"Och, hoch!" cried Miss Pilking, as she sat beside him.

He guided well, and used his whip. Every sound was muffled. Now and again a star was seen through the falling storm as the horse went plunging. Their knees were wrapped in a fur cloak. Miss Pilking started from her dreams, and demanded where she was. Bristol cracked his whip, and let his horse find the road. The sleigh light, which was a green lantern, let him see the curbed form of his strange midnight guest, and played fitfully on her withered face. He looked ahead into the white darkness.

"Long frosty miles of sin!" he said in an emotional moment.

It was near half-past three before they were at the outskirts of Little Pines. Ludd lay quiet and rigid with its ice-floor heaped with snow. Some of the lights which the skaters had left were burning in a line, others flickering in isolation. The snow was not so thick on the road as they entered Little Pines and the steel bottom of the sleigh began to scrape the stones. Miss Pilking woke with the jolting, and told him to stop. He said he could pay only a hurried visit, and left his horse steaming, expecting not to find it when he descended. Miss Pilking led him up, and in.

"Oh my!" she exclaimed.

He was glad that Maud seemed not to recognise him. He had seldom seen her, but now this sight appalled him. She turned at her name. It looked as if her hair was covered with dust. He noticed a curious tinge on her cheeks. Beauty turned to ashes, indeed.

"Make her speak," said Bristol.

Aunt Pilking called her by her name again.

"Eh, lass, ye're better, here's the doctor."

Maud looked wildly at them both, but couldn't speak. She formed her lips to begin, but every attempt was abortive. She seemed not to recognise even her aunt. On a sudden she broke into a smile. He seemed to see in it the beginnings to facial paralysis. Half her face seemed to turn upwards, and

the other half downwards, resulting in an expression of imbecility.

Bristol stood horror-struck, and wondered that Miss Pilking showed no sign of fear.

"I'll do anything for Maud, sir," she said.

Bristol went nearer Maud, and took her hand.

Such a warm little hand!

He looked at the colour of her face. It was the green of serpents. Perfect through suffering! he exclaimed as he went away pale and trembling. You mean one-sided through suffering.

His first thought was to summon a doctor. . . But was it his business? . . . He felt he should go and report at once, but could there be an investigation that would not affect himself? . . . He had become King of the Hornets.

Paul was to return shortly. Bristol sat bewildered over his accumulated troubles, trying to discover how he had been entangled. He had heard of Lord Sother's death, and knew that the loan would have to be paid into the Badcock estate. But that was a matter of small importance. He would pay it up himself. There was something more serious on hand, and a crisis might be near. He felt himself gradually giving way before a sense of uneasiness. He was almost surrounded by positive danger. It was a net and mesh-work of surprises and alarms. He summed it all up in two sentences—(1) Trifling with an old hag's crime; (2) Superfluity of naughtiness with Jessie. That was the

naked truth. Did it look so serious? He said no. He would marry Jessie, and so dispose of the second. He would . . . what would he do with the first?—

He prepared himself to inform the police sergeant next day, but when the time came he drew back. There might still be time. The writing on the paper that had wrapped the bottle he took to be the prescription for the poison. It was not complete, but it might help to discover the antidote. As it turned out, Miss Pilking had used strychnine instead, and he was going to make things worse by his interference!

Yet he had looked into toxicology as he had looked into everything, and he set himself to study the prescription. He compared it with the books, and took notes. It was dangerous work, but he thought he could pick his way. He made out an antidote and jotted it down in medical terms, never suspecting the truth. He was careful as to the proportion of quantities, extremely careful, although ignorant that it was all useless. He was busy discovering an antidote for silver-poisoning. It is *Argentum Nitratis*, he said, looking at the books. His antidote was some preparation of common salt, as was discovered in that day of uproar in Great Pines when the jury sat, and condemned Miss Pilking to life-long imprisonment. But it was foredoomed to failure, since Miss Pilking had only begun with *Argentum Nitratis*.

It was necessary to have a doctor's signature; he went at once to Dr. Muster. Dr. Muster will sign anything, he said, and I need not show him the contents.

Dr. Muster was still leading a sort of phantom life, blown about of every wind of suspicion and fear. He was wondering what was going to happen, but he still clung to the hope that he might live to see his tormentor tormented. It became his absorbing thought in spite of Widow Busk's warning to let things be. "Oh, no," he exclaimed, "if . . . if I could see him laid low the way he has laid me!"

"He will lay you again," she said. "He is not done with you. Leave him."

But Dr. Muster warmed himself up with the thought of revenge, and waited anxiously the return of Paul.

"I . . . I am sure he is a bad man . . . I . . . I hope so!"

Bad or not, Bristol came along with his antidote, and all Dr. Muster's bravery disappeared when he knew his enemy was in the house.

"He is here!" he said to his wife, and both of them shook.

"I told you!" said Widow Busk.

"Come in with me," he pleaded. But she would not go.

Dr. Muster came in with his accustomed timidity, and Bristol saw that his power over him was not diminished.

"You are wanting anything, sir?" asked Dr. Muster.

"Yes," said Bristol, as he sat down and took out his pocket-book.

Dr. Muster was biting his lips, and trying to discover courage enough to put a question. He was Paul's guardian as well as Bristol, and should know how things had been carried on. He ventured to mention the Badcock estate and Paul's name. Bristol thought he heard the word "loan." But it was sufficient to look steadily at Dr. Muster in a way which meant that he had nothing to do with the Badcock estate.

"What is it?" asked Bristol.

"Nothing!" said Dr. Muster.

"Sign this," said Bristol, presenting a doubled up paper with space only for the doctor's name. Dr. Muster hesitated, and asked if he might read what the paper contained.

"No," said Bristol.

"Really, sir, I beg you . . . please . . . is it quite . . . fair? I may be signing my . . . life away!"

"Have you so long to live now that it matters much?" asked Bristol, unperturbed.

Dr. Muster flitted about the room.

"Dr. Muster!" demanded Bristol.

"May I speak to my wife?" he implored, with his hand on the door.

"Widow Busk? No," said Bristol.

"I do implore you, sir."

"To purge me still," added Bristol, smiling.

Dr. Muster still waited for a little clemency, but waited in vain.

"Sign this," said Bristol.

"Most . . . most gladly," said Dr. Muster.

The medicine, guaranteed to be swift in its action, was sent to Maud, and Bristol awaited anxiously the result, while Widow Busk and Dr. Muster were thrown into new and undreamt-of-perturbations.

"Why did you sign it?" asked Widow Busk in terror. "You may have been signing our lives away!"

"What could I do?" replied Dr. Muster.

CHAPTER IV

THINKS THAT PATHOS WAITS AT THE END OF EVERYTHING

PAUL was returning to the snow-beleaguered town, but his own heart was lying snow deep as well. He had failed in his examination, and was coming back with shame on his face. "Will I drop into an ice hole?" he thought. But he would not have found one easily, because Ludd lay massive and black as if turned into rock. Even the infalling river, the Laddie, and the outflowing Lassie were labouring in congealed floods.

There was an old myth that the Laddie was always in chase of the Lassie, but destined never to make up on her. At anyrate, both are now running it ice-footed, and Laddie slips and stumbles, and at length gives up in despair, caught in the winter grips. It was a polar atmosphere. The sun indeed fought hard for empire in the day, and it was like the old war between Ormuzd and Ahriman. It was not light against darkness, but fire against frost. Ahriman remained victor, and for what he lost in the day he gained a hundredfold at night. In the

day he lost mere icicle dribble easily made up when the ice-wind rose. He laid his hand upon the rivers, and they turned glossy, rigid snakes. He seemed to be stretching his dreadful arms to the sun himself. And the sky, it too looked like a slippery pavement. Tales for winter! S'death, and such a tale!

Paul came home to announce his failure. One of the acutest of all possible sufferings for a sensitive and eager nature is the disgrace of failing in an examination. How could he face Maud? She would know at the first glance he had *not* got through. To be sure, he thought he had done his best. But, for instance, when the mathematical paper was put before him, it might as well have been a collection of instructions for the devilish rites of some savage religion. And then when it was proposed to calculate the discharge of some drain pipe which had been going wrong and behaving in a lamentable manner for the space of whole years—giving out at rates of simple and compound interest where it should have been withholding, and withholding where it should have been giving out—Paul gave up in despair. Then the French verbs. When *they* came he could not put Bristol out of his head, and for the life of him, Maud either—Bristol that afternoon in the garden: Maud in the garret. Faugh! it was a hopeless affair. He wished to push the papers from him, but remained, out of mere self-respect, to gaze at them in that profitless man-

ner known to unwary examinees. He handed in sheet after blank sheet which should have been close written with snug replies. And when he saw his Liliputian compeers exhausting their ink bottles in a satisfactory manner, he felt inclined to rise and ask for a stand-up fight all round in order to discover who was fit to be a soldier. He was agitated by a hundred things, Maud's illness in chief. How is she? he was wondering as he stared at such things as "*Si oiseau j'étais à toi je volerais.*" *À toi*, indeed, out of this Bedlam of grammar and mathematics! He knew, of course, he had failed, long before it was announced. But he kept hanging on for the result, living on the mere husks of hope that fall to prodigals and their kind. He came home feeling what a triumph it would be for Bristol. What would his sister say? They would all jeer at him. Perhaps he would have to go meekly back to The Rookery, and ask his guardian to pay Brind's loan.

He was driven in a sleigh which met him three miles from the most westerly point on the west side of Ludd. He was surprised when the sleigh-driver, instead of taking the circular road to Little Pines, plunged down towards Ludd.

"Stop! What!" cried Paul.

"Heh!" said the driver. "As hard's the road and harder," and sent the bells jingling on the horse's head. A raised snow road, covered with sand to prevent the horses stumbling, cut straight

over the loch, and only sleighs were allowed to pass.¹

Two had gone over before them. On both sides of the road were skaters and curlers, and even donkey-chairs for the ice. Paul recognised Miss Pilking's donkey hard at work among half a dozen mauling children. It seemed extraordinary audacity to play thus with Ludd, but the almost polar cold guaranteed the solidity of that perilous roadway.

"Curse these bells," said Paul, as the sleigh went jingling into Little Pines.

Every one seemed to know of his disgrace, and he looked shyly round. They met sledges coming and going—

"O the sledges with the bells, silvery bells?"

"La!" said his landlady; "gratulashions!"

But when Paul told her with a droop it was not so, she began to blackguard his examiners.

"Faugh!" said she, "and such a gent, born for a sodger!"

Paul asked news, and his landlady said Lord Sother was dead. But there was dearth of news owing to the interrupted communication between the towns of the district. He asked about Maud, and was told that she was said to be much the same. He started, and then said it was impossible. He

¹ Loch Ludd, or its prototype, was frozen over in 1895-96 in such a manner as to make the events described not merely possible but actual.

had had letters from her almost every day, although not lately, and she had told him that she was now perfectly well. He sat disconsolate a few hours in his garret, and tried to pluck courage to go to her. He felt himself to be an utter coward, and was wondering what sort of a "sodger" he would make. At length, after many stumbling resolutions, he went to Miss Pilking's flat. Lord Sother had said he was too thin, but he was much more so now. He went to his glass and put his tie right, and brushed his hair. His eyes were suffused, and his throat was dry. "What will Maud say," he thought.

Miss Pilking had laid all her recovered money on Maud's bed, but Maud asked her to take it away. There seemed no room for breathing, in spite of the cold, and Maud lay hallucinated, crying for Paul. She grew worse after she had taken "antidote," and it was impossible to keep her quiet. Aunt Pilking tried to hold her in bed, and stop her loud crying.

"Eh, ye bad girl!" said she, and left her.

"Don't leave me," cried Maud, giving in.

Miss Pilking started at every knock.

"When is Paul coming?" asked Maud, falling back weeping.

Miss Pilking did not give up all his letters, but used to open some in secret, and read others aloud to Maud, while Maud prayed her to desist.

"Will ye tell me ye don't like them!" demanded Aunt Pilking. "Such flattery!"

"Give me a mirror," said Maud, but Miss Pilking refused.

When she persisted in calling for it, her aunt held it tremblingly at a distance, but so far off that Maud could see nothing.

"I *will* have it!" Maud cried, rising in her bed and trying to leave it; "it's too cruel of you. Why not give me it? Is there anything wrong with my face?"

Aunt Pilking threw it at her and left the room in a fright. Maud looked at herself in the mirror, and let it fall with a shriek. The shock of the sight of her own face, green with the green of serpents, threw her into convulsions, out of which it seemed impossible for her ever to come sane.

"Send for a doctor!" she cried. "My face! Why did you not tell me? . . . Oh, where is Paul?"

"Hush, lass!" said Miss Pilking, in terror.

"Send a . . . doctor!" cried Maud, louder, "or give me poison!"

"Poison, eh!" said her aunt, running out. "What d'ye say, ye bad girl?"

Maud was tearing the bedclothes, while Miss Pilking sat wringing her hands in another room, deaf to entreaties.

Two days passed, and Maud seemed to become quieter, and spent hours without uttering a word. Yet Miss Pilking never ventured out, and superintended the opening of the door. She lived in dread

of raps. She expected every visitor to be a sergeant of police, and she lived in special terror for the arrival of Paul. When he knocked at the door, she rose with a "Och, hoch!" hoping that it would not be he. Bristol, too, was in the room, silent with Maud. He had come to see the effect of the antidote, and was little anxious for such a visitor at such a moment.

"Oh, how's Maudy?" asked Paul, smiling, and opening the door further to let himself enter.

"Better, she is," said Miss Pilking, and led him in. "Ye'd better wait here," she added; "there's somebody."

She hobbled before him in the lobby.

Paul felt his heart beating as he stood waiting, wondering why he had to wait. At length he grew impatient, and opened the door, excusing himself.

He came in. It was morning, and the room was darkened, and the bed-curtains were half drawn. In a moment he knew there was something wrong. He saw Bristol, who turned suddenly with an "Ah!" at his lips. Paul looked beyond him to the bed, and every other feeling became lost in a vast presentiment. He came forward and stopped.

"Maudy!"

She turned at the sound of his voice, and was trying to rise, but fell back broken in her weeping and disfigurement, with her breast heaving and her breathing stertorous.

"Maud! . . . What have they been—— O God, Maudy!"

He felt something terrible that was cleaving him, but stood immobile.

"Will you . . . you too *abandon* me," she cried, "in my hideousness? You too! . . . Oh, oh!"

"My God," he was crying, "what is this? Have you . . . have they . . . no doctor? . . . Oh, my darling! What is *this*?" as he approached.

She was trying to rise, and lay her arms out, and her head was in the air—her shorn head.

"Paul . . . Paul, I free you . . . of . . . of course I do. . . . Go and not look at me. I—agh—hagh—" (such were the sounds she made in her stiff breathing)—"not, am not Maudy any more!"

He could not move even to go forward to take her hand. She was not Maudy any more.

"How can he help it?" she said. "Go, Paul . . . give me only . . . one kiss . . . No, no, I will not ask."

Youth and maiden, if they had known it that afternoon in the sun on the uplands!

"No . . . no! Oh, da . . . darling!" he cried, as he ran towards the bed. "God help me—mine, anyway! Oh, my . . . lost . . . darling!"

"These are the deeps," said Bristol in a whisper, appalled.

Paul had the wreck of her in his arms and was kissing and weeping upon her there on the dreadful

bed. Bristol stood aghast, feeling as if he was partaking in some frightful apocalypse. "Paul," he said, under his breath as he went out, "almost thou persuadest me . . ."

CHAPTER V

BRINGS ON A FINAL STRUGGLE

LONG as his life had been, Dr. Muster had never seen such a case, and he stood at the bedside forgetting his personal agitations. Maud had drunk half the "antidote" in a wild prayer and hope that it might at least bring back her beauty before Paul arrived. Dr. Muster was examining the "antidote" and asking where it came from, while Paul stood trembling by his side. Maud could not speak, and Dr. Muster signed to Paul to bring Miss Pilking. He went to her door, but it was fastened from within. He heard her crying, "Heck, heck! There they are. Jail and ropes!" He returned dizzy to the bedside, and saw a strange look on Dr. Muster's face. He was holding the bottle up to the light with his shaking hand. He then removed the cork, and smelt the contents. He looked very intently at Maud, and took the skin of her cheek in his fingers. She lay without resistance, breathing heavily with shut eyes. Dr. Muster slightly pressed the skin between his fingers, and when he relieved the pressure it did not relax, but remained in a ridge. He

laid his stethoscope to her heart and her lungs, while Paul went reeling to the other side of the room. He felt her feet, and then covered her up. He turned to Paul, who was holding his own throat with both hands to suppress his sobs.

"How long?"

"Don't know—weeks—months."

"Sprig attending?"

"No."

Dr. Muster took up the "antidote" again and beckoned to Paul.

"This is very . . . strange!" he said, with a peculiar glance.

Paul's eyes met his, and there was haste in them both. Dr. Muster pointed to the bed, where the clothes were moving, and whispered, with his eyes widening, "Poi . . . son!" and then pointed to the bottle, whispering, "Antidote!"

Paul was in a stupor, and hardly believed his ears.

"Come at once," said Dr. Muster, suddenly, as if a thought had struck him.

They tried Miss Pilking's door, but it was still fastened. They heard "Ropes!"

How crime trembles at sound! Crime thinks that every footstep is the footstep of the avenger.

A thought had certainly struck Dr. Muster, and as he was driving with Paul in the sleigh he wished to communicate it. But it was not about Lord Sother's loan: it was far more serious. He tried to gather his scattering thoughts.

"Have you," he asked, "seen Mr. . . . Mr. Bristol?"

"Tell me . . ." said Paul, as they went driving rapidly through the snows, "will she get better? Where am I? . . . Where are you taking me? . . . Oh!"

"My dear boy," said Dr. Muster.

"Tell me, tell me!" cried Paul.

"If you wish to know the truth, I . . . must say no, unless there's a miracle."

"O . . . O God!" cried Paul, rising, while Dr. Muster tried to hold him down.

"Stop!" cried Paul to the driver, and before the sleigh stopped got out.

"Go on," said Dr. Muster to the driver, and turned round, lifting his hands, and saw Paul running back through the slush to Little Pines.

He had taken the bottle with him, and was still examining it, shaking it till the contents began to foam. He was unable to give precision to the thought that began to possess him, but a sudden suspicion made him stop at the chemist's to discover what medicines had been given out during the last fortnight. A book was kept into which all the prescriptions were copied. The last entered was signed "John Muster," and the doctor read it in a state of excitement that he could not conceal. It was the prescription for the very bottle he had in his hand, he guessed.

"I . . . I never gave——" he began, but

caught himself in time, and went out with the bottle, saying, " Good morning " instead of " Good evening."

His tottering brain began to right itself as it seized the thought that Bristol must be the author of the prescription, and that the paper he had signed was undoubtedly it. He went home to Widow Busk in alarm, and tested chemically the contents of the bottle, discovering that it answered as an antidote to certain features of the poisoning of Maud.

" Leave it alone," said Widow Busk, " and let us go away."

" Leave it alone! " ejaculated Dr. Muster. " My name is there! Oh! . . . he is a blackguard. . . . I knew, and how can I compass his . . . his end? "

He hesitated, bewildered by a hundred suggestions, and flitted through his rooms waving his hands. He thought of driving back to Paul . . . Paul would not listen . . . She was dying, and he would spend the last moments with the wreck of her in his arms . . . Every proposal that came to Dr. Muster was checked by the thought of his own safety. " Oh, crush that man! " he said, " and find out the truth! " Would he run and make a pact with him? He hesitated even to do that. He loved Paul too much, and he turned affrighted at the thought of being an accomplice. He looked again and again at the bottle, and rehearsed the signing of the paper until his head became giddy. His enemy was almost in his hands, but his hands were

tied so that he could not take him. In the desperation of his revenge he ran to Lawyer Crack, and as he came running in he made that eminent person leap from his chair.

"We have a . . . a blackguard in our midst!" cried Dr. Muster.

"A blackguard!" replied Lawyer Crack, holding on to his desk. "Who, sir?"

"The . . . the occupant of The Rookery!" cried Dr. Muster, and hurried out.

Lawyer Crack followed him, excitedly asking news, but Dr. Muster was already in his sleigh again, and replied only by gestures.

"I . . . I knew there was some'at in the wind," said Crack, as he prepared to go to Paul.

It was Christmas Eve, and it was hard snowing. It had been hard snowing when Bristol left Miss Pilking's flat. He went home on foot all the way. That girl is dying, he said, and who knows what Pilking is going to do. Old Pilking will confess. She feels the dry noose already. She will mention my name! Here's a pass . . . yet . . . yet, he said as he came up his avenue. It was getting grey and dark, and the snow took his long boots up to the knees.

There are, heh! strange moments in this life!

The sun was falling through the freezing snow cloud, but it was like a sudden fall in a fire which, instead of bringing loss of light and flame, sends up a bright, populous shower of it.

The light shot about the garden, and passed hastily over the heaped roof down to the glimmering banks and lawns, lighting up these calamitous, dim ways of winter.

The light that never was on sea or land may evidently be thrown upon them? . . . Is this it?

He started at the sound of Christmas bells. Merry, merry bells.

Christmas Eve—hem! Truth is often born in a manger, it is . . . S'death, such a swing journey we do have till we arrive at any terminus of fixed opinion, mere trapezing and acrobatic walking on tight-ropes in mid air. Ropes! Ah.

But he never expected the sight that met his eyes. As he passed the windows of his library he heard loud voices of women. He looked in, and saw Jessie and Fan in the middle of the room. He ran in, but found the door locked, and there he stumbled against his father, who was making an effort at entrance.

"Oh! oh, you blackguard and parricide!" shrieked the old man, groping for the handle.

"Get you to bed," said Bristol, and shoved him aside.

He ran to the windows again, but found they were also fastened. He looked through, and saw Fan on the floor. They had not seen him. Jessie was panting, and sinking into a chair. But the revolt had at last come. In his absence she had rifled his cabinet, and found in it many a strange thing:

a history of Miss Pilking, which was a close-reasoned essay on crime, with mention of Maud; heaps of money: notes about Paul and Maud: mention of herself and Fan: grim comment on Dr. Muster and Miss Pilking, and a hundred strange items. Opposite her own name an unutterable word. In her desperation she sent for Fan, who came unsuspecting. Loud verbal menace had been the beginning.

"Do you know—do you know, woman?" she asked.

Fan stood for a moment stunned, and then recovering herself broke out on the calumnious woman.

"I . . . I will not believe you!" gasped Fan, holding on to a chair. "You . . . you slanderous——!"

"He is a . . . oh, what is he not? Look!" said Jessie, coming near her.

"Will you pollute me, scandalous woman?"

"He is *mine*, though I hate him, and will make him renounce you!" cried Jessie.

"Lies!" cried Fan, turning faint.

"Open the door!" cried Bristol, and sent his foot through the window. Jessie started and ran. "Here he is! Oh!"

Bristol flung her from him, and entered the room with his father at his heels. Old Bristol went stumbling round demanding who they were. He tripped over Fan, and fell on his face.

"Oh, parricide!"

"Lamps!" cried Fan faintly. "Is . . . is it true?"

"Who are *you*?" said old Bristol, clutching at her.

Bristol lit no lamps, and the fierce wrangle took place in the dark. The old man, as if he did not require eyes to see, went out stumbling, holding his hands above his head, and crying for help. "Oh, oh, black day!" he cried, as he groped his way up the stair. "My God, is it well that I cannot see?"

"Liar!" said Bristol to Jessie. "Fan, Fan, would you believe a trull like this? Wished to get quit of her months ago. Intrigue with Black Harry!"

"Liar! Indescribable liar!" shrieked Jessie, and ran out; but Bristol did not know how she was laden with heavy news.

It took her all night labouring through the snow-floods. She might have found a sleigh, but she went stealthily through Great Pines by the back ways, and passed into the main road like a thief. It was months since she had seen that road, and now it lay white and black before her. How easily she traced black steps—almost heard them—over what had been the snow of her life. Eight miles of sodden snow with many a stumble, many a broken gesture and reaching of hands upwards to the stars where they shone like bright ice nuggets. A sleigh passed her with jingling bells while she lay black in

the snow heaps—piece of broken womanhood. Over the level miles and ice flats without a moon, and night's round hearth awaiting its late kindling.

Twelve at night and *one* and *two*, and sound of bells coming all the way from Bethlehem.

Give me a soul sitting in its mid calamity, and I will be kind to it. Yet at that moment her faith in others' love and goodness was like a poor night-light. But *she* loved him still to the full, and hated herself for loving him. She was grasping her hands as if to simulate touch with his. Touch leaves only exasperation. How desire winds much like a sensitive plant about youth's limbs, soft and gorgeous and serpentine in its first exquisite climbing. She looked up, and saw star upon star, the universe's rolling-stock! She sank back in the snows, and heard rivers pushing down ice. Heavy with news, indeed. She was going to Paul too late—months late. And in her loud cry for protection she almost forgot Maud. She remembered her own innocent childhood, much like thistle-down, but now grown full of stinging pricks. "And yet . . . and yet," she said, as she looked about fearfully for mercy and not for judgment.

Three and *four*, and much tarrying. If she knew how it lent him chance of swift escape she might take the road more bravely. But she asked herself if she could meet Paul. Somebody to *hide* me! *Four*, and a certain movement in the night as if he were turning in his first sleep. Not a bird stirring.

But solemn echoes of bells of Bethlehem ringing in a shepherd for the sheep. . . . Faint silhouette in the East, thin-pencilled. Heavy night, and heavier day! She saw Ludd lying silent like a sea, with snow ridged like frozen waves. Cold, but not so cold, and there was even a soft breath of thaw wind, a warning, maybe, that Ludd is to be played with no more. Morning is still far off, frost-chained, and very low in the skies. And the King o' the Air is casting his clouds like a draw-net for the stars. She saw Little Pines lying at Ludd's cold feet, and Ludd lying at the feet of the great mountains. And she sank on her knees again in vague travail like a goddess of birth . . .

CHAPTER VI

DEATH FREEZE

FAN lay weeping in his arms all night.

"Closer, Fan," he said.

It was all over, he thought. The future would be hideous like the past. Drown them both, then. He knew instinct again, and its fatality. "Nothing hurries for us except our fatality, Fan," he whispered. "Let us hurry with it."

The lamp was burning near, and a crystal bottle of red wine stood gleaming by the side of it. Fan was comforting him, and wondering how much he must have suffered from the bitter woman . . . She would pay it all up to him a hundredfold, she.

The long-awaited-for had certainly come at last, dearer for the waiting.

"Keep near me, Fan," he said.

"I will go, and come back to-morrow. You are excited and ill," she said, as she looked at his eyes. "She has injured you."

"No, no," he said, and the hours were passing. The fire died out, but the cold midnight did not touch them.

"Closer, Fan," he said.

"Oh, Jacob!"

"How nerves wriggle!" he whispered.

"It's Christmas," said Fan.

"What about it?" he asked.

He reached his left hand to the wineglass.

"Take some wine, Fan," he said. "There's red music in it"; and he held up a glass purple against the lamp.

They drank from one cup.

"Oh, it's enough," said Fan. "I'm not used to it."

"Neither am I," said Bristol. "Take another sip."

And they sipped together.

"It's near *twelve*," she said, "and I'll go," though she knew the long years were being revenged that night.

"Ach, Fan," he said, taking up the wine again. "Conscience is like a Zollhaus, Douane, or Customs office, complete even to smuggling. Like an exciseman, Fan, sitting for ever at the brain's wine vat, and smuggling many a fierce wine!"

He spoke many a word at which she wondered, muttering them between his teeth, as if one part of him was thinking aloud in defiance of the other.

"Wines of havoc!" he said, with havoc in his own eyes till Fan became afraid.

"Take a sip, Fan."

"Jacob, I love you!" she said, shyly.

"You used to throw across jasmine."

"And you honeysuckle," she said.

"That was long ago."

"Oh, oh!" she cried, with her eyes suffused.

"I'm glad I've had to wait. Jacob, Jacob," she said, "I am glad."

"Closer, Fan," he said, till midnight, like a dark nuptial priest, laid his hand upon them, and the lamp was paling.

The lamp was paling, and the hours seemed to have collapsed into moments. Suddenly Bristol started and almost let her fall. He turned round, and saw his cabinet lying open.

"Fan!" he cried, and ran towards it, discovering at a glance what papers were gone. The lamp went out, and Christmas morning was already in the room, grey dark.

"She's stolen my papers!" he cried, and came reeling towards Fan.

"Fan!" he cried again, and gave her a wild kiss.

"Oh, what is it?" asked Fan. "Let us get to church."

The Christmas bells were ringing. A sudden desire to take flight seized Bristol, but he stood paralysed for a moment.

"Go and get your father," he said hurriedly; "I'll prepare the sleigh."

"Your father and Mother Rachel!" he cried.

An over-mastering impulse to take himself and them all away took possession of him. He called

Fan back, and she came running in terror. They were the only two awake in the house, and their voices sounded loud. He took her face in both hands, and looked wildly into her eyes, until she tried to struggle away.

"'Ich will vergessen,'" he said, as he looked into her eyes, making her afraid. "'Was in mir ist will ich vergessen!'"

"Oh, Jacob, what is it," she cried, loosening herself. "Let us get to church and be . . . ma . . . married!"

The bells were ringing, and the morning was growing lighter. He hurried away to waken Black Harry, and told him to put the horses in the sleigh.

"The two o' them?"

"Yes, yes; quick!"

"'Ich . . . ich kann's nimmer sagen!'" he said, as he mounted the stair to waken his father. Something impelled him to carry off the blind old man as well. Anywhere, anywhere! Movement of some sort!

Black Harry went yawning and stretching to the yard, and opened the stable door, while the snow fell from the lintel.

"Losh me!" he said, "who's goin' to church at this braw hour? Can no stay in's bed? Woa . . . woa . . . hist!"

"Mercy on us! What's this?" said Mother Rachel, coming along with a cloak over her arm, "that's a-goin' on?"

"Turnin' goody, eh?" said Black Harry, as he dragged out the sleigh.

"D'you know that Miss Fan——"

"I know that Miss Fan . . . he, he!" said Black Harry. "Sudden marriage it's a-goin' at last to be. Two hours late, maybe. I've heard o' 'em two months and two years. An' 'e old pa; *you* should a heard *him* in watches o' the night!"

Mother Rachel's reply was prevented by the arrival of Bristol carrying his father half-dressed and rolled in a blanket.

"My God! what is this?" cried the old man, struggling in his son's arms. "Are you going to kill me? Jacob, Jacob! Oh . . . the cold!"

Bristol, as if Herculean strength had suddenly come to his aid, hoisted him into the sleigh, and then told Black Harry and Mother Rachel to get in. He took the reins himself, and drove down the avenue to the gate where Fan and Seer Mossman were waiting. Fan was pale beside the rosy old man.

"Excellent, my son!" he exclaimed. "A merry Christmas!"

He thought they were going to church, and took his seat beside old Bristol, while Fan and Mother Rachel sat opposite.

"A merry Christmas!" repeated old Bristol scornfully, shivering in his blanket. "A nice beginning! What is all this about?"

"Do you not approve?" asked Seer Mossman.

"I . . . I don't know where I am going. Where?" asked the blind man. "Such cold!"

"It'll be warm in church," said Seer Mossman. "They must have had a service all night. This is a pleasure I did not expect."

As they drove from The Rookery gate the stars were slipping through the cloud nets. Dawn was red like rowans. Bristol drove at a rapid pace, and had already passed one half of Great Pines. He had forgotten to remove the bells, and the sleigh went jingling through the town. No one was on the road, but they heard singing in the church.

"Stop!" cried Seer Mossman, as they passed the church, but Bristol drove on.

"Oh, Jacob," whispered Fan, looking up to where he was sitting, "stop!"

"Ah, Jacob is going to the Catholic church," said Seer Mossman, smiling as the horses still plunged forward. "It's all the same."

"Woa! woa!" said Black Harry, who was sitting beside Bristol—"woa!" when he thought the pace too quick.

They heard the singing in the church—

"Peace on earth and goodwill!
Hearts that are gentle and still
Hear the first music of this
Far off infinite bliss. . . ."

The sleigh was still plunging through the heaped snow, when they were nearing the Catholic chapel. They heard the song of the *Adeste Fideles*.

"Here Jacob, then," said Seer Mossman, preparing to get out.

"Little Pines!" cried Bristol, as he cracked his whip.

"Woa, woa!" said Black Harry. "Steady!"

"Ah, it's the church at Little Pines! . . ."

"Oh, is it?" said old Bristol. "It's the church in jail, I believe!"

Seer Mossman did not listen, but looked round on the glittering morning. They were now a mile beyond Great Pines, and were going at a great pace. The loose snow was flung back on the sleigh by the horses' hoofs. It was cold, but the thaw wind was in the air. On every side, snow in jasper heaps.

"'Though your sins be as scarlet,'" said Seer Mossman cheerily, looking round, "'they shall be as white as snow.'"

"Oh, Jacob!" whispered Fan, "let us go to church."

"His sins!" cried old Bristol, fiercely. "They're unwashable, sir. . . . My God! where are we going? . . . Do you know that last night there was a woman——"

Bristol heard his father speak, and whipped up the horses so that the sleigh gave a lurch, and every one screamed.

"My God! let me out!" cried the blind man.

"There was a woman——"

Fan sat pale and trembling.

"Jacob, not so furiously, we have time," cried Seer Mossman.

"Woa! woa!" said Black Harry, putting his hands on the reins.

Mother Rachel and Fan were sitting silent, Mother Rachel praying to be kept safe. Black Harry was giving Mother Rachel significant thumps with his foot.

The horses were again galloping through the snow heaps, and the bells were jingling.

" 'Peace on earth and goodwill! ' " muttered Seer Mossman.

"Peace!" repeated old Bristol in mockery. "There were two women——"

They were now in sight of Ludd and Little Pines.

"Steady, master!" said Black Harry.

Bristol drove on in silence, while they all seemed waiting for some terrible happening.

"They're not playin' any more wi' auld Ludd," said Harry. "That game's over this thaw. Look at the cracks and holes. There's a skin o' water all over."

"My God!" exclaimed the blind Bristol, "is he going over the loch? . . . I'm told its breaking now. . . . Where are we going? . . . Only *I* am blind and you can all *see!* "

Seer Mossman attempted to quieten him, but both Mother Rachel and Fanny were white with terror. The sleigh was rocking with the pace, and they were all moving restlessly in it. Surely they did not know they were already hearsed in it—nimble waggon of death. They went rushing past Ludd over the slush miles. Suddenly Bristol gave a cry. There was a rider ahead, galloping towards them. He recognised Paul, and then Dr. Muster and Jessie behind in a

sleigh. A road branched down to the lake. Bristol turned into it.

"For God's sake," cried Black Harry, "don't go over the lake!" and he jumped off.

Mother Rachel screamed and rolled out on the snow. Only the three were left, and Bristol on the box.

"My God!" called old Bristol, rising in the sleigh as he felt the slippery ice beneath them; "let me out! . . ."

They were in the middle of the loch, and the ice held well, but the horses were becoming unmanageable. Black Harry, Mother Rachel, Paul, Jessie, and Dr. Muster were standing aghast on the banks.

"Is he there? is it he?" cried Dr. Muster, waving his hands frantically, while Paul prepared to follow over the ice.

"For God sake!" cried Black Harry, and held him back.

The sleigh was pitching, and they could hear desperate cries. One of the horses stumbled, but rose again. Their hoofs were trampling the ice, which was getting softer and softer.

"Jacob!" cried Fan. "Oh!"

Suddenly Bristol was thrown on the ice. The horses were struggling and attempting to rear, but were sinking, and the ice was breaking all round. Death was already in among them.

"Oh!" cried old Bristol, clutching Seer Moss-

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man and Fan as they perished together. The ice floor cracked up with a detonation.

"Death is so emphatic!" said Bristol, as he grappled with the ice edges, and disappeared. . . .

It was at that wonderful moment when the stars pass.

THE END.

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